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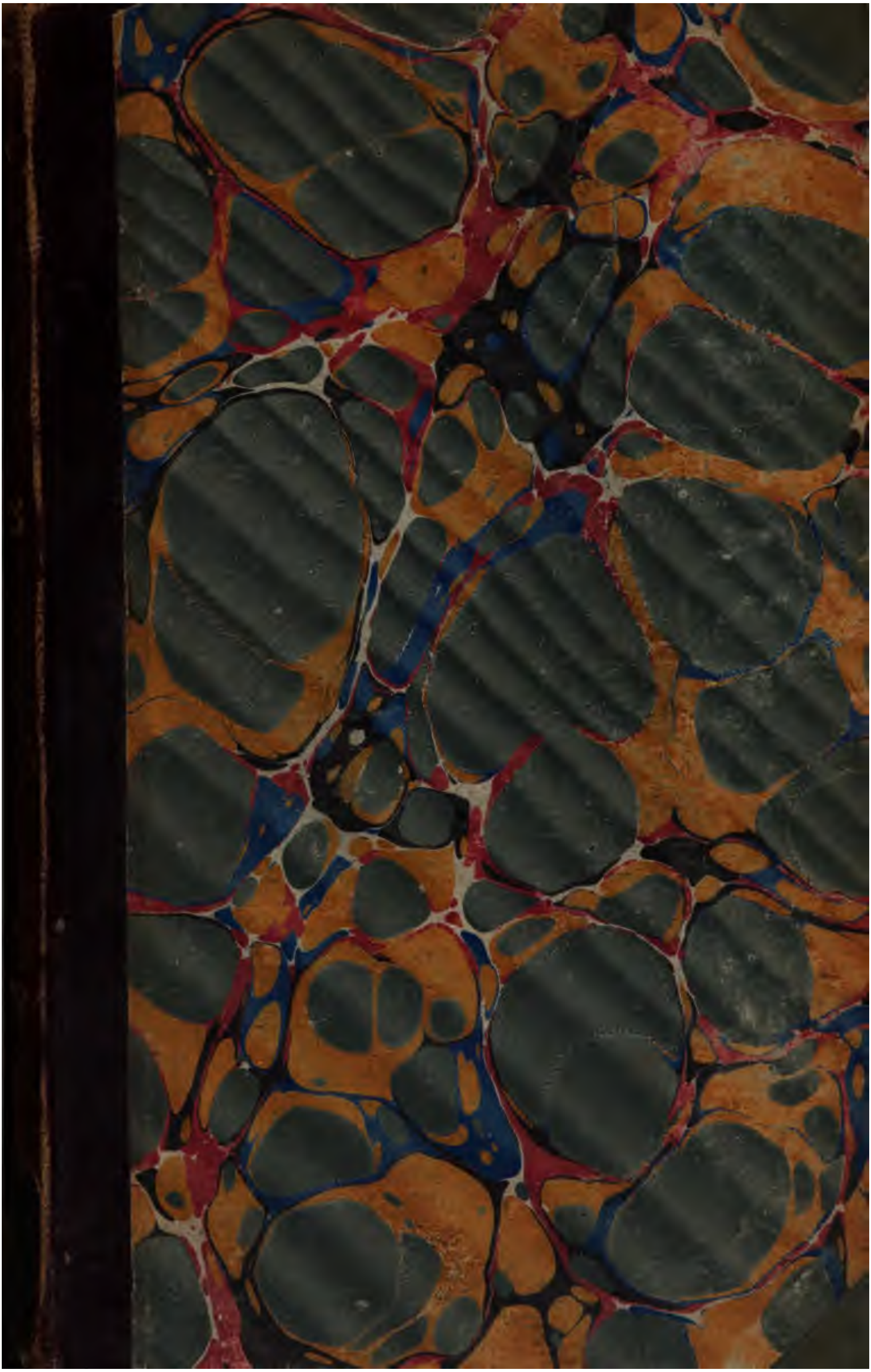

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
THOMAS CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.
1855.

249. v. 8.

BIBLIOTHECA · BODLEIANA

EVELYN LASCELLES.

BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I.

FOREIGN TRAVEL.

Passing through the unique and exquisitely beautiful valley of the Rhine—with which Mrs. Hastings, in common with many other travellers, was grievously disappointed, for this reason, that it requires a poetic and imaginative mind to enter fully into such scenery—we visited all that is most worth seeing in Germany; explored the romantic and interesting ruins of Heidelberg, wandered amongst the solemn and sombre shades of the Black Forest, and traced the windings of the lovely Moselle.

Baden-Baden we made our resting-place, remaining there several weeks. Percy, Harry, and I passed most of the day in long walks, my uncle sometimes joining us, sometimes occupied in his own botanical or antiquarian researches; my mother made sketches; Mr. Allan read the papers at the public rooms; Mrs. Hastings drank the waters, and guide-book in hand, methodically and laboriously sought out the picturesque. She found, or fancied she found, that the waters had a wonderfully good effect on her health—they certainly had not upon her temper—for she grew more exacting and irritable every day. Fortunately she stood in considerable awe of my uncle, so that when he was present, there were but few outbreaks. Yet still, rather than be much with her in future, I often thought that I should, if I had the choice, greatly prefer earning my own bread—*not* as a governess or companion—but in a humbler sphere of life. As I watched the women at their various rural occupations, gathering fruit or making hay, I more than once indulged in pleasing reveries of such a life, and thought how happy I could be passing my mornings in churning butter and distributing milk to the poor, in my cool, clean retreat, and my evenings in writing and study. I read Burns's works and life again, and dwelt, with peculiar pleasure, on those passages which describe and praise rustic occupations.

Mrs. Hastings was rendered miserable, and rendered other people miserable, for the most trifling causes—often for no cause at all. If one of the family were five minutes too late at meal-time, it would derange her temper for the whole day. If her favorite dog—a fat, snappish animal, which always put me in mind of herself—how curious it is, by the way, that dogs frequently bear a resemblance to their masters or mistresses, either in character or physiognomy, even in preferences and aversions (Mrs. Hastings' dog hated me extremely) —if this dog had a cold, the whole house was disturbed—if a cap or bonnet she had ordered did not arrive punctually to the moment—if a dish were not well-dressed, or if the weather happened to be rainy, she would mourn and complain as if some serious misfortune had befallen her. Towards the end of our stay there was a very wet week, which obliged us to forego our delightful rambles, and remain within doors.

One day, when my uncle and brother were

spending the morning with a friend, Mrs. Hastings was more than usually fractious; she had spoiled a piece of satin she was embroidering, by throwing coffee over it, and Wasp had a thorn in his foot. Harry extracted the thorn, and I went through the rain to procure some floss silk, and then drew the pattern again for her on a fresh piece of satin. As this was done of my own accord, as I paid for the materials with my own money, and as the work had occupied most of the morning, I hoped that she would be pleased, but she did not even thank me. Disappointed and annoyed, I sat down at a distance with a book.

"You are always reading," observed Mrs. Hastings, fretfully, after the lapse of about a quarter of an hour. "If you read, why don't pou read aloud?"

"With pleasure," I answered, and I turned to take up a flimsy novel, which I knew she liked.

"No, read what you have in your hand," she interposed. "Quick, child, can't you; there is no merit if you dont do a thing at once."

"Now, aunt, you are too hard upon her!" exclaimed Harry, looking up from a number of "Punch" he was reading. "She has not lost a moment."

"Harry!" exclaimed Mrs. Hastings, in displeasure. "Do you intend to read or not, Miss Lascelles?"

I commenced hurriedly, scarcely knowing what I read—

"For human bodies are such fools,
Wi' all their colleges and schools;
That when nae real ills perplex them
They mak enough themsels to vex them."

No more could be heard for the loud, harsh laughter of Mr. Allan. As I paused till the burst was over, Mrs. Hastings asked abruptly why he laughed, and what rubbish I was reading.

"Rather severe," observed Mr. Allan, who seldom lost an opportunity of pointing out faults in any of the family—every member of which he disliked, I believe because he thought our claims on his wife interfered with his own, "—ra—a—ther severe, I must say."

"Did you mean anything personal by reading those lines?" asked Mrs. Hastings, quickly.

"I am sure she did not," said my mother.

"Of course she did," interposed Mr. Allan.

"Let her answer for herself," said Mrs. Hastings.

"No," I answered boldly; "it was a coincidence—I mean," I added instantly, and painfully sensible of the blunder I had made, "that I was reading that passage at the moment."

"A coincidence!" said Mr. Allan, pointedly.

"A coincidence," repeated Mrs. Hastings, her face reddening with anger; "a coincidence with what?"

"I did not mean to use the word," I replied.

"But since you did use it," said Mr. Allan, with one of his odious sneers, "perhaps you will explain."

"Perhaps," said I, with forced calmness, "you will have the goodness not to interfere between my aunt and me."

"Not interfere!" he exclaimed, with a frightful grin. "That idea is most entertaining. Am not I your relative too?"

"No, thank heaven!" I replied, for I regret to say my indignation got the better of me.

He made a grimace, and said—

"Thank you for the compliment. But you have wandered from the point, my dear young lady."

"What point?" said Mrs. Hastings. "Oh!

I recollect, the coincidence between me and that doggrel."

"Surely," said I, evasively I fear, "you cannot call Burns doggrel?"

"The point, the point," exclaimed Mr. Allan, tapping me on the shoulder.

"I am sorry," said I, drawing myself away from him, and addressing Mrs. Hastings, "that I should have used a word which displeased you, and beg you to excuse me."

"An apology *is* not an explanation," interposed my tormentor; "though you may well ask pardon for calling a person, your elder and your superior in every respect—a fool!"

I looked at him indignantly and reproachfully.

"That's not a fair construction, sir," said Harry.

"Don't you trouble yourself about constructions, except those in your Latin grammar," said Mr. Allan, sharply.

"A fool! call me a fool!" cried Mrs. Hastings, in a towering rage.

Snatching the book she hastily ran her eye over the offending passage, and then deliberately commenced tearing out the leaves. It was a book that Devereux had given me, in happier days, with my name in his handwriting on a blank page; and laying my hand on hers I implored her not to destroy the volume. Whereupon she flung it on to the floor, and rising, flounced out of the room.

My mother looked much distressed; Mr. Allan regarded me with a malignant expression of triumph; and Harry kindly kissed me, and bid me not mind. In a few moments Mrs. Hastings' maid entered, and said that her mistress desired Mr. Allan would come to her immediately.

At this moment my uncle and Percy returned. The latter was very indignant declaring that he would make Mr. Allan remember his behaviour to me, and strongly urged a separation of parties; but my uncle, after kindly soothing me, said that this would be displaying ill-temper and petulance, such as we were condemning; that young people must expect to meet with similar trials in the world, and must learn by them to command their own tempers.

"Indeed, dear uncle, I tried to command mine to-day," I exclaimed.

"I am sure you did, my dear child," he replied. "And those flushed cheeks tell me how much the effort cost you."

I felt pleased and happy, as I always did when he praised me. My brother remarked—

"It was so shameful of them to attack her when neither of us were present."

"It was, my boy; and do not fear that I will suffer the matter to pass unnoticed; but a few words will, I think, come better from me than from you."

My uncle's few words were very effective. Mr. Allan apologised to me for what he had said; Mrs. Hastings condescendingly gave me a very trumpery annual, which she observed, I should find much more amusing than that stupid Burns, to say nothing of the engravings—and during the rest of our tour, no more storms occurred.

CHAPTER II.

WE ARE NOT SO BAD AS WE SEEM.

I HAVE seemed all my life destined to be perpetually involved in the affairs of other people. Some persons appear to be almost universally selected for the confidences and confessions of others, and this without any peculiar merit of their own—unless extensive sympathies—an intuitive perception of which probably induced these confidences — be reckoned as such.

To those who love to look below the surface of things, to discover the mainsprings of action, to trace the streams of thought and passion to their source, to penetrate the hidden workings of the souls of others; this intimate association and connexion with our kind is not without its interest and its use. And if, in prosecution of the study of human nature, we become acquainted with meanness and depravity which otherwise we should not have known; do we not, on the other hand, find out much of good, and pure, and noble, of which we should have been ignorant?

Yes; let the cold moralists of the present day say what they will, there is goodness, purity, and noble sentiment in the world; there is disinterestedness and devotion—we are not all selfish, narrow-hearted, calculating beings, as those writers represent us; writers who, with all their affected morality and religion, are guilty of that worst infidelity, the disbelief in virtue.

And if our sympathies often involve us in what is unpleasant and painful, what, after all, is life without action, passion, excitement? And what but these gives power and energy to the mind? What but experience of the struggles and pleasures, the sorrows, and even follies of our kind, adds vitality and truth to the conceptions of genius? Without such experience, a poet or an author may attain to harmonious versification, and beauty of style, but his verses, however polished, will be tame and cold, his periods, however rounded, uninteresting; he will ever want that magic power over the hearts of his readers, without which all other gifts are valueless.

This record comprises, as it professes to do, merely some passages—the most important ones of my life. Many are, for the sake of unity, and to avoid confusion, necessarily omitted, although the incidents and characters connected with them might not be devoid of interest and amusement. Some, both incidents and characters, are too strange to have a chance of being believed, if described on paper. As the acute Voltaire remarks. "*Le vrai n'èst pas toujours le vraisemblable.*" Most authors may have observed—I have done so, as far as my own experience goes—that the parts most objected to in their works as overdrawn or improbable, are *the truest.*

These reflections were partly suggested by various strange adventures and friendships, met with or formed during our residence at the most beautiful of the Spas. Every traveller has probably observed that at watering places, foreign ones especially, several phases of social life are to be seen, which we might look for in vain elsewhere. Whether the greater freedom from conventional restraint is favourable to the developement of character, or whether it merely allows the true character to appear more plainly, is perhaps not easy to decide.

Among the friends we met were Lord and Lady Robert Rockingham, who seemed very glad to see us; and we were much together. I was sorry to find that Barbara's temper had not improved. She seemed to delight in teasing her husband, who several times told me that he had been "regularly sold," that marriage was a grand mistake, and that he recommended me, if I had any regard for my own happiness, to keep single.

They had a child, a little sickly infant, which was always screaming, and which Lord Robert said, parental fondness apart, was the most unpreposessing little urchin he ever set eyes on.

Barbara appeared to like me much better than formerly, and before long we became great friends. I endeavoured, whenever I could find or make an opportunity, to put them in better humour with each other, and to smooth down the inequalities of temper, which, as I became intimate with the couple, were not in the slightest degree checked by my presence. The consequence naturally was that they liked me to break the *tête-a-tête*, and when the two families were not together, constantly came or sent for me.

During the three months of which I have been speaking, I had heard but once from

Lady Clara, and that was soon after crossing the channel. Her letter contained no information on the subject most interesting to me; as Devereux had been, almost immediately on reaching ——shire, summoned back to London on business, which was likely to detain him some weeks. I did not therefore expect to hear again for some time, and in the meanwhile I wrote to her regularly, giving, as I had promised, an account of our travels. But when three months had expired, without my receiving another letter from her, I became alarmed, and wrote urgently, begging her at all events to let me have two or three lines, addressed to Ems.

The day before our departure from that watering-place brought me the anxiously expected letter.

"I would not write, my dear Evelyn," it commenced, "until I could tell you the result of the experiment you were so desirous should be tried. It has completely failed. You would pity me if you knew how much I have suffered since we parted. I have been constantly with Mr. Devereux, and am now fully convinced that we are a most unhappy and ill-matched couple.

"No one who has not had personal experience can tell the misery of living in a state of constant dread; fearful each moment of giving offence, of producing reproaches, or jealousy, or sullenness, when intending to be most kind and affectionate; to be forced to weigh every word, and ponder over every action, to feel that the most innocent word or action may be misinterpreted. If all this, as you know, is bad enough in a lover, it is a hundred times worse in a husband.

"Then thoughts of one far away will intrude, and I cannot help indulging in dreams of the brighter fate which might have been mine; but away with such retrospections. Ah! why is it that in this world, knowledge, wisdom, experience, every good and valuable gift comes to us—if it comes at all—too late! When youth is departing, when our heart is seared and our early promise blighted, we wake to find that our life has been one delusion! And the world, I am told, remarks how domestic Mr. Devereux has become; how fond he and his wife are of each other, and how much this marriage is for the happiness of both!

"Henry has not written again, which makes me uneasy. I heard from Sir John Ramsay, who has a brother in the same regiment, that he is as wild, extravagant, and reckless as ever. I am writing very egotistically, dear Evelyn; but I must not forget one thing concerning yourself. I have discovered that Augustus, at the time he married, believed you to be married also. Some one mentioning your name the other day he changed colour, and presently said—

"'You spoke of Miss Lascelles, but she is married—I heard, on good authority, that she was married more than a year since.' The man whom he addressed replied that his friend Courteney, who knew you very well, had spoken of you as Miss Lascelles, only a few weeks ago.

"'Oh, Heaven! then she is not Courteney's wife!' I heard Augustus mutter. A few moments afterwards he quitted the room, to return no more that evening."

The letter concluded with many expressions of kindness and affection, which touched me sensibly, the more so as I knew, by experience, that people commonly find an excuse for quarrelling with those whom they have made intimately acquainted with their affairs, as soon as the confidant can be of no further service.

CHAPTER III.

REPENTANCE AND REPARATION.

The Rockinghams were our companions in our journey home, which was performed slowly, that we might stop by the way to see what was worth seeing in the Belgian towns. At Antwerp my mother, uncle, and I viewed with delight the master-pieces of Rubens.

How wonderful is the power of genius! As we contemplate the works of a mighty intellect we feel ennobled, exalted; our souls are raised above the wearying and petty commonplaces of life; and thus, as it were, in the presence of genius, we become ourselves half-inspired.

Mrs. Hastings hurried through the various collections of paintings, for the sake, I believe, of saying that she had seen them, while her husband was occupied in comparing two different catalogues together, and marking, with a pencil, the inaccuracies of each. Lord Robert usually walked off, after a quarter of an hour's evident suffering, in the picture gallery, to refresh himself, as he said, with a stroll by the river.

His wife declined these expeditions altogether, confessing that she thought paintings a dreadful bore.

"Is not this more sensible," she said to me, "than pretending taste for works of art when one has none, as so many people do?"

I agreed with her entirely; and thought of Dugald Stewart's remark, which surely applies to all arts, that, "in poetry the effect is inconsiderable, unless upon a mind which possesses some degree of the author's genius, a mind amply furnished by its previous habits with the means of interpreting the language which he employs, and able, by its own imagination, to co-operate with the efforts of his art."

Barbara had for some time been slightly indisposed, and she perpetually made herself worse by eating too much, and indulging in unwholesome-made dishes. Her husband and I often remonstrated with her, but she paid no attention to us.

"You who could live contentedly on bread, fruit, and water," she would answer, "and who do not care for dainties, cannot tell the privation it is to me to go without; and as to Robert, he wishes to get rid of me, and marry some body else; that is the reason why he doctors and diets me."

In our passage across the channel she persisted in remaining a long time on deck exposed to the chill autumn air, without sufficient covering, and keeping the baby with her. At length after many entreaties, I prevailed on her to go down into the cabin. The nurse was incapacitated by sea-sickness, and the care of Barbara and the infant during the long and rough passage devolved upon me. She was thoroughly chilled, as was also the poor infant, and both seemed very unwell. Barbara had taken a dislike to the stewardess and would not suffer that offending dignitary to come near her. She was agitated by a perpetual dread that little Robert was starving—it was one of her whims to be constantly cramming the child with heavy food, contrary to my mother's advice—and once in the night when my back was turned she almost choked him with brandy and water.

Soon after our arrival at Dover, both mother and child were attacked with measles.

Barbara had the complaint severely, and aggravated her illness by impatience, and unwillingness to do as the doctor desired, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I made her take her medicines.

The worst at length was over; she was pronounced convalescent; and Lord Robert, who had shown great kindness and consideration for his wife, appeared much pleased, and thanked me for my attention to her.

"Now," he continued, "as you are very tired go and take a little rest."

I was really fatigued, for I had been up great part of the night for more than a week; as my mother, owing to Mrs. Hastings' being indisposed, had not been able to assist me in nursing Lady Robert, and I replied that if he would promise to stay with Barbara, I would go to my room for an hour or two. He readily agreed to this, and I added, in a whisper—

"You will not leave her, for you know how restless she becomes if left with only the nurse."

"Oh yes, I promise," he returned, and as he spoke he drew a seat to the side of his wife, who was sitting up in an arm chair by the fire in a dressing gown. "I'll take great care of her."

He took her hand kindly; but she drew it hastily away. However in a moment as if half ashamed of herself she said—

"Thank you, you are very good. But I am tired of playing invalid. I want to go out; and so I told the doctor this morning."

"Yes, and he was horrified at the notion, and said it would be the height of rashness to go out—such a bitter wind as there is, too."

"Indeed I fear you must not think of leaving the house these four or five days," I said.

"Well well, then I must stay in, I suppose," unless I can give you both the slip. Don't look at each other in that way, "she added a moment afterwards; I am not going to be rash; that old goose need not lecture. You won't stay away from me long, Evelyn, will you?"

I assured her I would not. Her husband reminded her that I was tired.

"Well, of course I want her to rest," said Barbara fretfully. "I mean that she'll come to tea with me at seven o'clock. That will be three hours hence. You are going out to dinner you know, so we shan't have you boring, thank goodness!"

"She is only in fun," said I to Lord Robert who looked disconcerted. "She will miss you very much."

"No she won't," said Barbara; her features relaxing into a smile, however. "He will be glad to get away, won't he?"

"If you had seen his face just now, as he sat down by you, I think you would not say so," was my answer.

"Thank you," said Rockingham.

"I say, if I should die," resumed Barbara, "would you and Robert marry?"

"Certainly not," I answered.

"Don't talk in that style Barbara," said her husband.

Barbara laughed. "But Evelyn—" she commenced. "No, never mind; go away now. I can see that your head aches dreadfully."

I went to my room, after learning that my mother and the Allans were out driving; and desired that I might be roused a little before seven. Then lying down I fell into a sleep from which in less than an hour I was with difficulty awoke by Harry, who came to tell me that Barbara was gone out driving.

"Impossible!" I exclaimed still half asleep.

"Indeed she is," he replied. "I saw her in a pony phaeton, with a very smartly-dressed lady, and so I ran back directly to tell you."

Hastily throwing on a shawl and bonnet, I set out, accompanied by Harry, in the hope of seeing the invalid. Walking along the high street, my companion pointed out an open carriage, standing at the door of a shop. In this carriage sat Barbara, alone. I approached and expressed my wonder and concern at her imprudence, begging her to return home immediately.

"I only came out for one breath of air," she replied. "You need not look so frightened. Robert ran out to speak to some one, and in the meantime a friend of mine seeing me at the window, came in and persuaded me to dress and take a drive. I wish she would not keep me waiting so long. Oh, here she is."

A tall woman, in a crimson satin cloak, came out of the shop, and I recognised the unpleasant face and harsh voice of Mrs. Warrenne Devereux. The sight of this person made me start and shudder, she was connected with so much that was painful, and I had always considered her as the mainspring of Deverex's unhappy prejudices.

"Oh! Miss Lascelles," she exclaimed, as she stepped into the carriage, and took the reins from the servant, "*Comment vous portez vous?* How are you this long time? Are you Miss Lascelles still? I am *parfaitement bien*, *merci*," she continued, answering a question I never asked. "*Jamais mieux.* All *i miei nemici—amici*, I mean, say I look *merveilleuse.* I have been half over the habitable globe since I saw you, *c'est-à-dire* to all the Spas, to Rome, and *à cette chere Paris.* Hand-in-glove with the President—charming man—told me all his state secrets. But Rome—Oh! *bellissima, superbissima*—that, indeed, is a city! *Vraiment ma chere j'ài tant voyagé, et tant parlé y linguas straneros*, that I have almost forgotten how to talk my own."

"May I beg you," said I, gravely, when at last she finished this speech, which I had tried in vain to interrupt, "to lose no time in taking Lady Robert Rockingham home. It is dangerous for her to be exposed to the cold air after her illness."

"Dangerous—pshaw!" exclaimed Mrs. Warrenne. "I am going to take her *à mon hotel*, and introduce her to Count le Papetière, an intimate friend of mine. If you'll come with me, I will introduce you, too. You shall both dine with me. *Montez par derrière. Mon domestique* can walk."

"No, thank you," I replied. "Barbara, I entreat you to return home. If Mrs. ——, if this lady wishes to go farther, Harry can fetch you a coach."

"Don't be so troublesome, child!" cried Mrs. Warrenne, impatiently. "Come, jump in; I can't make these horses stand any longer."

But I continued to urge the point, and at length prevailed on Barbara to refuse to go farther. Mrs. Warrenne darting on me a look of undisguised ill-humour, drove off at a rapid pace, and Harry and I walked quickly home. To my great surprise and concern, Barbara was not there. We walked about the town and cliffs looking for her; and Lord Robert and my mother, who had returned, joined in the search, but we saw nothing of the invalid until two hours afterwards, when the pony-carriage drove up to our hotel, and she was handed out with great ceremony by Monsieur le Papetière. Lord Robert was in great distress at his wife's imprudence; he had merely gone out to speak to a friend, whom he had for some years lost sight of, and was scarcely absent a quarter of an hour. As we had feared, Barbara brought on herself another attack of illness much more serious than the former. Notwithstanding all that could be done for her, she continued to grow worse, and the day week of her imprudent frolic, was in a dying state. She was perfectly aware of this herself, and appeared much perturbed in mind.

"It is not the thought of death," she said to me, when, by her desire, we we were left alone together, on the evening of the day when her recovery was despaired of—"for I am not attached to the world; but there are many things which, though I thought little of them at the time, now press heavily upon me. My cousin Cecil—it is my conduct towards him that I chiefly reproach myself with. Poor fellow! I wonder whether he forgives me?"

I endeavoured to soothe her, by reminding her of Him through whom forgiveness is promised for all our sins, small or great, if sincerely repented of; and then added that I had no doubt Cecil had long ago pardoned her unkindness.

"You wish to comfort me," she cried, "but you do not know half my unkindness." She turned about restlessly, and presently added—"I wonder whether he would refuse to—to see me, if he knew I wished to see him!"

"I am sure he would not," I replied eagerly. "Shall I—"

"Oh! yes—yes; write to him," she exclaimed. "Directly, or it will be too late."

The letter was immediately despatched, and she thanked me gratefully.

"You have taken a noble revenge for my conduct to you at different times," she observed. "I never thought I should like you so much, and that you would be such a friend. Evelyn, besides the ill-temper which I showed to you and your sweet sister, when you visited us—I—I—" She paused, and then continued, hurriedly—"You will hate me if I tell you—I stopped your letters, or, at least, those sent by some of your family—I did not read them—I was too proud for that—I threw them into the fire. What can you think of me?"

"You were very young then," I replied, "and you were influenced by your love for—"

"I was—I was—" she exclaimed, with emotion. "But that was no excuse."

"Some excuse," I argued. "You would not do so now."

Our conversation then again turned upon religious subjects, concerning which she seemed to have clear and right ideas; though hitherto her heart had been but little interested in her belief. I was confirmed in the impression that she was rather spoiled by circumstances than naturally bad; and that there were many good points in her character.

During the night and great part of the

following day she was delirious, talking wildly and incoherently. Courteney's name was constantly on her lips. Poor thing! I felt for her. In this false and hollow world, aught of true feeling in whomsoever it may be discovered, at once finds its way to our hearts, calling forth our sympathies and awakening our interest even in behalf of those whom we have previously regarded with indifference, or, it may be, with aversion.

The evening brought Courteney. An affecting interview took place between him and his cousin, and I thought I had never seen him appear to more advantage than when soothing and cheering the last hours of one who had though life wrought him disappointment and sorrow. Lord Robert too evinced great kindness and feeling for his wife. He could never forgive himself for having left her as he did, and notwithstanding her assurances that no blame could possibly rest on him, continued quite miserable. The next day she desired to speak to him alone. In a few minutes we were again summoned. The invalid was holding her husband's hand in hers; and looked at him with kindness and something of respect, as she said slowly and feebly—

"I have been speaking to Robert about

the disposition of my property; I have told him of the relation in which my cousin and I once stood; of the unjust and iniquitous disinheriting of his father (the elder brother) through the crafty machinations of mine. My husband has shown a generosity and freedom from selfishness for which I honour him. I reminded him that the estates could not be divided, but that it was in my power to make either him or Cecil the heir, that the person who did not inherit the landed property must be content with two thousand a year (settled on him and his heirs) from monies in the funds. I said 'Robert, you have, in the eyes of the world, the stronger claim upon me, in the eyes of God is not Cecil's the strongest? You will inherit some fortune from your father, and I would rather that our son was comparatively poor than that he should be enriched by possessions which ought to be another's. You have heard my sentiments, I leave the decision to you. If you seriously desire me to decide in your favour I will do so, and no one shall know of what has passed between us.' He answered that he entirely agreed with me, that he was satisfied with the proposed arrangement, that he would not wish to make my last act one of injustice, and had rather possess a moderate fortune which he had fairly a right to, than a large one which was not honorably his own. Therefore Cecil," she continued, "you have him to thank, not me."

There was a pause, which no one seemed to know how to break, until Lord Robert going up to Courteney shook him cordially by the hand. A faint smile crossed Barbara's features.

"You must always be friends," she said. "Cecil, my husband is very odd, but he is a good creature. He has never said an unkind word to me, though I have often tried his temper, Evelyn, once more I thank you for your kindness. I should like to see my child."

The baby was brought; she kissed it, murmuring a few words of prayer; and then her eyes sought her cousin. He approached and took the hand she feebly extended to him, with a countenance expressive of sorrow and pity. A few sentences were exchanged between them in so low a voice as to be inaudible to the bystanders, but I saw a flush mount to Barbara's wan cheek, and one low sob heaved her breast, while Courteney with a tenderness of manner which was peculiarly his own, bent over her and kissed her forehead. As he would have drawn back she detained his hand, and then beckoned to me to draw near. She extended her other hand to me, looked at us for a moment as we stood side by side, and then suddenly joined our hands together. We both started in surprise, I felt that Courteney's trembled; while my cheeks were burning. The dying woman's face lighted up with a smile.

"May you be happy, Cecil," she said; "and you Evelyn; and think of me sometimes without harshness. Think that if my life was faulty, I—I repented at last!"

Her voice faltered, and shortly afterwards she grew rapidly worse. At her desire a solicitor was sent for, and a fresh will drawn up. My uncle read and prayed with her, as he had done several times before, and she expressed herself much comforted.

After lying some hours in a state of stupor, she roused again; but a great change had come over her countenance. Looking at her husband, her child, and me with an expression of greater sweetness and brighter intelligence than I had ever seen in her face before, she seemed to bid us a kind farewell. Her eyes then rested on Courteney; the expression deepened and became almost heavenly; in a few seconds more she was a corpse.

CHAPTER IV.

I MAKE A RASH PROMISE.

It was the evening of the day after the funeral; and my uncle, mother, and brother, Courteney, Lord Robert, and myself, walked out for the first time since poor Barbara's death.

We took our way to the beach with the intention of walking on the sands for a mile or two and returning by the road. It was one of those lovely evenings which sometimes occur late in autumn, calm, soft and genial. There was a soothing yet melancholy influence in the breathless stillness, in the changing sky, and misty colouring of the ancient castle and cliffs, in the subdued but exquisitely beautiful tints of the emerald ocean, in the low musical ripple of the ebbing tide, broken only by the occasional plash of oars, as some light skiff shot past towards the dim and shadowy white sails in the offing.

"What a sweet scene and evening," I observed to Courteney.

"Yes," he answered. "It is like the autumn of life, when the passions are subdued but not destroyed, the fire of youth dimmed but not quenched, when a holy calm succeeds to feverish excitement, when we enjoy the present, review the past with complacency, and tranquilly await the future."

"You draw a happy picture," said I, "but shall we feel thus in the autumn of life? Shall we not rather mourn over time wasted, energies misapplied; shall we not regret to see our places occupied by others; will there not be intense pain in the thought that we ourselves are not what we once were? No, there surely can be nothing desirable in the decline of life."

"Cannot friendship and affection," said Courteney earnestly, "make any period of life happy?"

I replied, that I believed there was nothing in the world so valuable as friendship and affection.

"That is scarcely an answer," observed Courteney.

There was a long pause, and we walked slowly along the sands. Presently my companion said abruptly—

"I leave this place to-morrow; it depends on you how soon we meet again."

"Let it be very soon," I replied, with emotion. "You cannot think how I shall miss you; what pleasure your society is to me—how, the longer I live, the more I feel the worth of such a friend."

"We will always be friends," said Courteney, in an agitated manner. "Shall we be nothing more? You change colour—your eyes are full of tears. Answer me, dear one—I am now in a position to offer you a fortune, ample for—"

"Stay!" I said; "you do me great injustice. Do you think *that* can make a difference in my—my—"

"Your feelings. No, dearest; but—"

"Let us say no more on this subject," I interrupted.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Do I hear rightly? Evelyn, Evelyn—why not—tell me—"

"The past," I said; "I cannot forget the past. I cannot forget—"

Courteney looked at me penetratingly, and said—

"I understand your meaning." He paused, a cloud passed over his brow, and he resumed, in an altered voice—"Foolish, deluded that I was, to place my happiness in your love. I ought to have known that with you, affection, truth, constancy count for nothing—that the devotion of a life moves you not—that a heart which would be faithful when youth and beauty were no longer yours—an arm which would shield you, as much as human power can, from the storms of life—are valueless in your sight. Had I been selfish, narrow-minded, cold-hearted; anxious to depress rather than to elevate you—to crush your genius, from an ungenerous and contemptible jealousy—had I been ready to desert you for a prejudice, a caprice, then, perhaps, I might have been loved with all the depth and passion of your wayward heart, Evelyn!"

His words, and the events which they recalled, affected me most painfully. I tried to answer, and burst into tears.

"Forgive me," cried Courteney, hastily. "I did not mean to hurt your feelings. I spoke in a momentary bitterness of spirit. I am myself guilty of the selfishness I censure in another. Yet," he added, after a moment's pause, "I believe that my love for you is not selfish. I grieved deeply for your estrangement from him you loved. Had I not thought that love was past, I would not have spoken to you of mine."

"It *is* past," I faltered, "but—but—the wound is unhealed. I could not yet love another. And could I bear to accept the affection of your noble and generous heart, when I was unable to love you in return as you deserve, as you ought to be loved? No, believe me, it would be as little for your happiness as for mine."

"I think you mistake," he said more hopefully. "You are kind enough to like my society. I cannot believe that a union with me would make you unhappy—for myself, I would be content that you continued to feel for me—may I say the affectionate regard you have long entertained? I believe these were your words upon a former occasion; and I would trust to my unceasing, anxious study of your happiness and comfort, to deepen and strengthen this friendship. Do not weep so bitterly, dearest. God knows I would not persuade you to take a step of which you might afterwards repent. Forgive me if I have said too much. Remember, in my excuse, that —I never loved but you, Evelyn," he said, struggling to command his voice. "I have loved you as man seldom loves woman—loved you for yourself—for your mind, your heart, your character—mine has been no romantic, no selfish, no momentary passion."

"Would that I were more worthy of such love," I sobbed. "Would that it were in my power to—"

"To make me happy?" he added. "It *is* in your power, Evelyn. My fate is in your hands."

"I—I must have time to deliberate," I at length replied in a voice hoarse with agitation.

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed. "A day—two, three days."

"No," I returned, "a few minutes will suffice."

We had been standing during the latter part of this conversation in a place where the jutting rocks formed a sort of recess or bay.

"I will leave you here for a short time," said Courteney.

When he was gone, I sat down upon a fragment of rock in a most painful state of mind. I tried to concentrate my thoughts—to reflect calmly. Ought I not to sacrifice my own feelings for the sake of one who had been so constant, so devoted, who loved me so much better than I deserved? How could I bear to witness the disappointment, the grief which my refusal would cause? Yet something at my heart rose against the union. I solemnly asked myself, not whether I could be happy as Courteney's wife, but whether I could make him so. I could not answer the question satisfactorily, and then again feeling overcame reason, and I shrunk from the thought of this marriage; to reproach myself the next moment for selfishness and unkindness to my best friend.

How long I remained in this state I know not, but I was roused by seeing Courteney standing before me. We both started; I believe it was at the expression each saw in the other's face. His was pale and agitated, while his manner betrayed the most painful anxiety and suspense. *And his fate was in my hands!*

"Evelyn, you are ill!" he exclaimed, as springing forward, he knelt by my side and supported me with his arm. "Do not speak to me yet," he continued, with his usual thoughtfulness and unselfishness. "I will wait — a day — a week — as long as you please."

He breathed hurriedly, and I felt his heart beat with painful violence. My own smote me.

"No," I gasped, "I have decided. Cecil, I will be your wife!"

CHAPTER V.

DELIRIUM.

It seems strange, but I have no distinct recollection of anything that passed during the remainder of this (to me) eventful day. I have a vague impression of seeing Courteney's face radiant with joy, while he uttered words of gratitude and affection, of reaching home long after the rest of the party, and hearing our absence wondered at, of following my mother to her room, and telling her all, of her embracing me tenderly, and saying she was sure I should be happy; of being all the evening in a dreamy, half stupified state, from which I attempted to rouse myself, with indifferent success; of seeing kind eyes anxiously fixed on me; of hearing enquiries whether I was ill, to which I answered that I was perfectly well; of trying to sing, but being unable to do so; of being seized with such violent shivering and faintness as I was going up to my own room, that I was obliged to sit down on the stairs and recover myself; while through all a weight seemed to be on my mind which I was unable to shake off. Then came a feverish and restless night, during which a crowd of thoughts seemed to chace each other with the rapidity of a whirlwind through my brain; with short intervals of sleep, from which I started, sobbing violently—then a vision of my mother, looking sad and sorrowful, and saying something that I was not able to understand; and then a long, long night of pain and terror, in which all the scenes and incidents of my life from earliest childhood appeared woven into a strange and incomprehensible drama where I played sometimes one part, sometimes another; while fictitious characters either from my own works or others that had made a strong impression upon me, joined in the action and added to the confusion.

And through all this a haunting consciousness of impending evil—a nameless, mysterious, indescribable dread hung over me like a gloomy shadow. It was as though some fearful but invisible presence—some shapeless, voiceless, viewless spectre, were always hovering near; darkening, changing, distorting, blasting all things; imparting to every scene and every person, no matter how different, a vague but appalling similitude; seeming to breathe on them and on me, a dire, chilling influence as of the grave. And yet it was not Death—I knew not—guessed not what it was—and in that dim uncertainty lay the might of its strange and potent spell.

At length, I awoke to find myself recovering from a brain fever. I learned that Courteney had departed as soon as I was out of danger, leaving a letter for me which contained the following lines:—

"I need scarcely say that you are freed from your engagement to me. I thank you not the less for the sacrifice you would have made of your happiness to mine. I speak not to you of wretchedness or despair —I am not wretched or despairing. It is only the weak and morbidly sentimental, who sink under the wounds of the heart. With duties to perform, and a responsible station in life to fill, I shall find interest, and be supported by the hope of doing good. I shall not try to forget you—that were impossible, but I shall learn to think of you and of my ill-fated love, as we regard the visions of our earlier years; as things apart from the world and the world's hard realities."

Some other lines had been written, but completely erased; the word, "Farewell," and the writer's initials were alone left.

I read with a strange mixture of pleasure and pain. In this world of clouds and sunshine, how often are a joy and a regret found side-by-side!

CHAPTER VI.

I REFUSE TO TAKE A HINT.

Mrs. Hastings fortunately found the sea-side dull, and returned to London.

We remained another month at Dover; during which period Lord Robert, who seemed to consider himself one of the family, continued with us, and on our return to Heathfield, paid us a long visit. His child was placed to nurse with the wife of our gardener, under my mother's superintendence, and improved rapidly in health and vigour.

"How dreadfully solitary I shall feel to-morrow," said Lord Robert, to me, with a sigh, as we returned from a visit to the baby, the day before his departure. "I shall come again soon, you may depend upon it. Mrs. Lascelles has just given me a general invitation; a real sincere one, not empty ceremony."

"I am sure it is sincere," I rejoined, "and I hope you will avail yourself of it. You will often want, of course, to see little Robert."

"Little Robert—yes—I was just thinking about him. I was wondering, Evelyn—what do you think I was wondering?"

"I cannot tell at all. When he will begin to walk, perhaps."

"No, no! He will walk, I suppose, when other children do. I was wondering whether—some year or so hence—he—he would mind having a step-mother?"

"That depends entirely on the sort of woman she might be," I replied.

"Yes, true, very true. But supposing she were very amiable?"

"Why then I should think Robert would have no objection—and you—it would be well for you too; left a widower so young."

"Do you think so," he exclaimed, eagerly.

"But if I may advise," I resumed, "you will choose some one really suited to you—some one—"

"Like yourself, Evelyn."

"No I am not the sort of person."

"Ah! you think you are too handsome and too clever for me."

"That is not a fair inference. I thought we understood each other, Lord Robert—but if, when I am seriously advising you, you will talk nonsense, I will say no more."

"Don't be angry, I implore! If I *do* marry again, depend upon it I will select a truly good and sensible woman."

"I am rejoiced to hear you say so."

"But do not look so grave, Evelyn. You surely know that I would not displease you. But admiring—respecting you as I do, you cannot be surprised—"

"That you like to consult me. Very natural, and I feel the compliment."

"You interrupt me. I know that I am greatly inferior to you in every respect."

"Do not say so!" I exclaimed. "It gives me real pain that any one should say or think that. Have I ever showed or affected any superiority?"

"No, never."

"Then you have no right to say so. There can be no true friendship unless people meet, as it were on equal terms—if one is made to feel his or her inferiority to the other—a feeling which I would rather be the most stupid and common-place of mortals than inspire."

"You are the last person to inspire it." cried Rockingham, warmly. "What I liked in you from the first, was, that with all your talents, you are essentially feminine; nothing is too small or too trifling for your attention—your superiority never intrudes itself, it is only apparent in the silent, nameless, but indiscribable charm which you throw over the existence of others—one forgets, to see you in every day life, that you are aught but a tender-hearted affectionate girl, born to make the happiness of a domestic circle."

I laid my hand on his arm to interrupt him, yet I could not but feel gratified—no one but those who have suffered from somewhat similar causes to those which had blighted my life, can imagine how deeply—I wished to stop him, but could only falter out—

"Oh, that every one had but judged me thus!"

"I—I have recalled some painful thought, I fear," said Lord Robert, penitently.

"You have given me genuine pleasure," I

replied. "Your praise—far—far beyond my merits as it is—has yet touched my heart too nearly for me to call you flatterer."

"I am no flatterer," said Lord Robert; "my praise, I know, is worth little, but I speak from my sincerest conviction. Any one who would think otherwise is unworthy of your regard."

"Yet some have thought otherwise," I answered, striving to overcome my reluctance to approach this subject, "and—and the painful impression thus made, can never be effaced."

"Never, Evelyn, never! Is there no probability that a year or two hence—you still so young, so loving, so—"

"No—none," I answered, very seriously.

"Painful impressions are very bad things," observed Lord Robert, with a melancholy look.

"But, fortunately, they do not prevent our taking a strong interest in the friends we like," I replied, cheerfully, "and you will always be one of mine."

"Thank you, thank you!" he exclaimed, "you are very kind—you always were, I understand you. I am proud to call you my friend. I shall avail myself of the privilege to consult you in every thing; and shall never stay long away from Heathfield Rectory."

CHAPTER VII.

"KILLING TIME."

THAT winter I passed with Mrs. Stanley at Brighton.

The first six months of the following year almost all my time was occupied by little Harry, who, on his being attacked with a painful and lingering illness, my mother brought home to be nursed. Since my departure, Mrs. Hastings Allan had made home very uncomfortable to the poor fellow, and a heart infinitely less tender than my kind parent's, might have been touched by the letter he wrote, describing his state when illness was added to his discomforts. He was unable to leave the house, and as he had few mental resources, and his temper, never placid, was rendered fretful by pain and long confinement, my powers were taxed to the utmost to amuse and keep him tranquil. As was natural, the society of boys of his own age now afforded him no pleasure, and he depended entirely on those around him for entertainment and interest. If I sat down to read or write, he was sure to want me to talk or sing to him; if I went out, even for a short walk, he was restless and impatient till I returned, and thus my life was literally passed by the side of his sofa. Of course, with an invalid thus dependent upon me, I could not but refuse all invitations to go out, with very few exceptions. For this, I believe, I was more pitied than I deserved to be, for balls and parties now caused me more *ennui* than pleasure. I do not mean that I had never enjoyed these amusements, but I found that two or three seasons sufficed to weary me of them; the novelty had gone off, and I viewed dancing and similar gaieties, as a child, after a time, does its rejected toys, longing for something less frivolous and more satisfactory. This is probably the case with all who have some aim in life beyond mere amusement, and are not driven to all manner of expedients for klling time. Killing time! What a phrase for a rational and responsible being! As Dr. Johnson observes, "half mankind, however they may profess to value time, are perpetually wishing each separate and individual portion of it at an end." Yet the world usually considers these human butterflies, these time-killers, as enjoying life far more than those who have some worthy object to which the greater portion of their time is devoted. Mistaken world! These votaries of, and laborious searchers after, pleasure, who are languid, restless, and dissatisfied even when surrounded with all that they most desire; what do they know of the intensity of enjoyment felt by higher intellects and larger hearts? Poor triflers, you are beaten even on your own ground! Even the frivolous gaieties which bound your horizon, the being whose element is toil, mental or physical, enjoys far more than you. The earnest student, the man or woman of genius, the aspirant for distinction in one of the numerous fields where reputation may be won, on whom you gaze with somewhat of contemptuous pity, how would your sentiments change if you could read his soul! But you can not! That soul is as incomprehensible to you as a Greek poet to a ploughman, or algebra to an infant. Little minds may be to a certain extent ambitious—they may desire to shine in society as beauties or wits, to be courted for riches or worldly honours, to be the star of a circle the lion of a *coterie*, but the noblest kind of ambition—the desire to employ all our gifts and powers to the glory of Him who gave them, and for the good of our fellow-creatures—to perform some action, complete some career, or achieve some work that shall merit the admiration and reverence of posterity—such ambition is to them a name not an idea!

BOOK IX.

CHAPTER I.

HIS CHILD.

Lady Clara was not in London the early part of this season; though Devereux was during the whole of the session. She was in delicate health, and remained at a villa her husband had taken for a few months at Richmond, Miss Doleby being her companion. She wrote to me frequently—long and affectionate letters; and at the time of which I speak, I knew that she expected shortly to become again a mother.

I regretted to find that the prospect of this once greatly-desired event appeared now to afford her but little pleasure.

"She herself," she said, "was quite contented with Frederic, and she had long ceased to hope that even the birth of a child would make the married state of herself and Devereux happier. I was, however, more sanguine, and it was with sincere joy that early in May I read in the *Times* the announcement of the birth of a son and heir. A week afterwards I received a letter from Lady Clara herself, written in high spirits.

She said that Devereux had hastened down from London immediately the intelligence reached him; that notwithstanding an important debate, in which he was to have taken part, he remained with her three entire days; that she had never seen him so happy; that he had embraced the infant with the tenderest affection, and that towards her he had been particularly kind and gentle. She was to join him in London as soon as her health allowed her to travel, which she hoped would be in a fortnight; in the meantime Augustus came to Richmond almost every day.

About the middle of August I received a note from Lady Clara to say that previous to accompanying Devereux into —— shire, she had arranged to spend a long day with us, and bring her two little boys. A long day! with what different feelings does this announcement inspire us!

Sometimes we feel that the shortest day would be too long; sometimes (as in the present instance) that the longest day were far too short.

I counted the moments until I held her in my arms, after more than a year's separation; and my pleasure was increased by seeing that she and Frederic looked well and happy.

She was prepared to like my family, who were all delighted with her, and received her as an old friend.

My uncle was pleased to find that she knew many of his opinions and pursuits; and she expressed herself much pleased to be at last introduced to my home and its occupants.

Then the child—*his* child—with what indescribable emotion did I look at it—and trace in its tiny and half-formed features a resemblance to those once so loved.

Had the little Augustus been ugly and uninteresting, I doubt not that I should have found some beauty and some interest about him, but he really was a singularly interesting child, and as handsome as could be expected, even considering the remarkable beauty of both parents.

"Every one says that he is the image of his father," observed Lady Clara, in answer to a remark of my mother's; "his eyes, his mouth, his forehead. Of course Augustus thinks him a prodigy. He has laid plans for his future life—decided what school and college he shall be sent to, and he is already ambitious for his son. He says," continued Lady Clara, with one of her low musical laughs, "that the boy is to be a statesman. 'Those small lips,' he said yesterday, 'may one day command the applause of listening senates, that little brain may influence the destinies of a nation.' And you, Freddie," she added putting Augustus into my arms and drawing her eldest born to her knee, "you will be as great a man as your brother; perhaps greater. See (as the baby smiled at its brother, who hugged and kissed it with great fondness) they love each other already—and God forbid that a spark of jealousy should ever be kindled in those two childish heart's."

"Augustns," she said presently, when we were alone, "has spoken most kindly of Frederic, saying that his prospects shall be as little interfered with as possible; and since the birth of his own son the presence of Frederic has seemed to have a less painful effect upon him."

I pressed her hand, and as she fondly returned the pressure said, "and you, dear friend, and he too, will be happy at last!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BREACH IS WIDENED.

Alas! this gleam of happiness was destined to be as transient as April sunshine, leaving a gloom which seemed deeper from the previous brightness. Only a week or two after the visit just mentioned the infant, over whose birth there had been such rejoicing, whose life, humanly speaking, appeared for many reasons so desirable, was seized with convulsions and expired in a few hours.

Devereux's grief for this loss appeared to have by no means a softening effect upon him. He was from home at the time of the child's seizure, and returned just in time to see the infant breathe its last.

Except when the news of its illness was first communicated, he had shown no outward sign of sorrow. He had not even shed a tear when he looked for the last time on the little lifeless form of the being who had caused a fresh and healthful spring of affection to gush forth from the depths of his seared and solitary heart.

He passed from the chamber of death to the one where sat the mother of his child. She was weeping, but not inconsolable, for her eldest born was in her arms, who had grown to her heart for more years than his baby-brother had months.

"Thank God you are still spared to me, Frederic," she faltered, "my first and longest loved child."

These words and this feeling, however natural, jarred on the heart of the bereaved father; and he turned away without one word of sympathy or tenderness. And then it was days before they met again, and when they did, a double barrier of restraint and reserve had sprung up between them, and both were more unhappy than ever.

Lady Clara deeply resented what she called her husband's unfeeling conduct, and before long, another cause for ill feeling arose.

Lady Clara had not heard from Melford since he reached India, until one day soon after her arrival at Thorne Hurst, where, as she and Devereux were sitting at breakfast, a letter was brought to her, at the sight of which she changed colour so much that Devereux's attention was attracted, and his eyes rested on Melford's handwriting, which was marked and singular.

It was a large letter, almost a packet, the writer, with characteristic recklessness, utterly disregarding postage or convenience.

It was now Devereux's turn to change colour, as he asked, with ill-repressed anger, how that fellow dared presume to write to her? This drew forth an indignant reply from Lady Clara, which provoked stern and bitter words from Devereux, who insisted that throwing the letter into the fire, unopened, was the only way to treat Melford as he deserved; that unless she did so he must believe that she cared for the young man, and encouraged his presumption.

"'I told him,' wrote Lady Clara, from whose letters the previous account is condensed, 'that I *did* care, and should always care for Henry, as my cousin; that for a full year I had not heard from him, and that I was naturally anxious to be informed of his welfare.' As to my encouraging him in the 'presumption,' of loving me, I told Augustus that he ought to know me better than to suspect it possible, but that if he did not, the fact of my having persuaded Henry to leave England, spoke for itself.

"He asked what security there was that Melford would not return. 'His word,' I replied, proudly. 'He promised solemnly not to return until he had my permission.'

"'Then,' said Augustus, 'you can have no objection to showing me the letter, or reading it aloud.'

"I felt my colour rise with indignation. He misinterpreted this evidence of emotion, and his brow became dark as thunder. Was not my position a painful one? To show the letter without knowing what it contained, were treachery to Melford—and I had no right to betray the confidence and expose the weakness of a friend and relative, even to a husband, when my own heart acquitted both that friend and itself of any thought of ill.

"I endeavoured to explain this, but Augustus was deaf to reason.

"'I will not insist,' he said, 'which, under the circumstances, I consider I have a right to do, either on your showing or destroying the letter, I only say that if you refuse to do either, I must draw inferences to the last degree discreditable, both to your character and to Melford's.'

"I scarcely know what, I answered," continued Lady Clara, "but my spirit was thoroughly roused. Bitter words passed between us, such words as quench and destroy love for ever.

"He proposed another alternative, which brought my indignation to a climax—namely, to send Melford back his letter unopened.

"'Insult him!' I exclaimed. 'No, any thing rather than that!'

"And snatching up the letter, I put an end to this painful scene by committing it, with my own hand, to the flames.

"I believe that when love is driven from the heart, its place is filled by aversion—a vacuum cannot exist *there*, more than in any other part of nature. Indifference is a negative feeling, we can never feel indifference for one whom we have once loved—we may feel hatred.

"And my poor cousin—I am thus prevented

from receiving the long-desired information of his state; from soothing, encouraging, advising or reproving—for how can I tell him of what has passed?

"But even these causes for sorrow have been almost forgotten in a new source of anxiety. My boy—my own darling Frederic, who, as you know has been at home with me for some months, and whom, since his poor little brother's death I cannot part with, looks thin and delicate, and has lost his appetite and spirits. He has no positive ailment, but I cannot help feeling very unhappy about him.

"How often do I wish that you were near me, Evelyn. In this world we seem fated to see those we love best, only for a short time and at long intervals. It is very kind of you to write to me so fully and frequently. Be sure that you continue to write the address in a feigned hand. I wish, if possible, to avoid any more 'scenes' at present."

At the time of receiving this last letter, we were again by the sea-side. My health had been much deranged by anxiety, and close attendance on the sick boy, who was now almost well again. The habit that I had contracted of greatly abridging my hours of sleep in order to gain some time for my literary pursuits, which I loved more than ever, probably had its share in bringing on a low fever, which confined me to my room for several weeks.

Let all young students, who, in the flush of youth and strength, think to over-tax their powers of mind or body with impunity, take warning by my example, and believe that nature will, sooner or later, avenge herself for the infringement of her laws.

The privation of my usual exercise had the more effect upon me, that I had never been a very sedentary student. My place of study was frequently the fields, or the woods, or the sea-shore; and large portions of my works had been composed during some solitary ramble.

Whilst I was ill, I received a letter from Lady Clara, informing me that Devereux was gone to Ireland on business connected with some estates he possessed in that country.

The writer was evidently in very low spirits. She said that she led a quiet and secluded life during Devereux's absence, having no companion but Miss Doleby, who was full of melancholy forebodings about Frederic, about Melford, about Devereux, about everybody, in fact, including Lady Clara herself.

"She is constantly telling me," continued my poor friend, "that the child has an unearthly look about the eyes, and always speaks to him in a low and mournful voice, which depresses his spirits as much as it does mine.

"Although the North of Ireland is perfectly tranquil, she is sure that some riot will break out whilst Mr. Devéreux is there, or that he will be massacred in cold blood for giving a *quietus* in Parliament to that insolent Irishman, Mr. —.

"Henry Melford, she insists, was a dead man from the moment he set foot a second time on Indian soil; and she is constantly trying to persuade me that my lungs are affected."

Before I left my room, another letter from Lady Clara arrived.

It contained only a few lines, written in great agitation; imploring me if I loved her to go to her instantly.

This I begged to be allowed to do; but my mother and the doctor would not suffer me. My uncle promised that I should go as soon as I was a little stronger, but finding that excitement and impatience threatened to bring on a return of fever, he decided that I should be allowed to have my own way.

Lord Robert, who was passing a few days with us, kindly offered to escort me into —— shire, which was within a day's journey. Having seen me into the carriage, which was waiting at the station, he bid me farewell, and a few miles drive brought me to the house.

On arriving, half-dead with fatigue, illness, and apprehension of I knew not what, I was shown at once into the drawing-room, which, for a moment, deceived by the waning light of a short autumn day, I thought to be empty. I soon saw, however, near a window, at the further end of the long apartment, the forms of two persons. One, a man, whose air and attitude bespoke extreme listlessness and languor, reclined on a couch, while his companion, in whom I immediately recognised Lady Clara, was sitting near him.

Advancing, I called her by name. She rose hastily, uttered an exclamation of surprise and joy, and threw herself into my arms.

"Thank God you are come at last," she faltered, and then drew me towards the sofa.

"Who is that?" demanded the invalid, in a voice whose tones seemed not unfamiliar. He started nervously as Lady Clara pronounced my namee, and then, as I looked at him earnestly, he said—

"Do you not know me, Miss Lascelles?"

As he spoke I recognised the features of Henry Melford.

"You here!" I exclaimed, in astonishment and sorrow.

"Look at me," he answered, smiling sadly and bitterly, "I shall not be here long."

Even by that imperfect light I could see that he was fearfully changed. I took the thin hand extended to me, but could not speak. In a few minutes Lady Clara conducted me to my room.

"I began to think that you, too, had deserted me," she said.

"Desert you!" I exclaimed, embracing her. "But—but how happens it——"

"I know what you would ask," she interrupted. "A week ago he appeared before me; so suddenly and unexpectedly that it was some time before I could believe my senses. How could I reproach him?—how bid him depart, when I found that he was a dying man?"

She burst into tears. I soothed and caressed her, but could not repress a deep sigh. She observed it, and added, quickly—

"Surely you do not blame me?"

"No," I answered; "I do not blame you; but he ought not to have come."

"Not to see me, his only relative, once again before he dies?"

"Not to endanger your peace—nay, perhaps, your reputation."

"My peace!" she exclaimed. "It is impossible to be more miserable than I have been for the last six months; and how can my reputation be—" She stopped, and her colour rose. After a moment, she added, tremulously —"He is my relative."

"Yet not so nearly related but that he might be your lover. His coming here, after all that has passed, just at the time Mr. Devereux is away—"

"Is most unfortunate. But what could I—what can I do? Oh, Evelyn, Evelyn, help me!"

She wrung her hands, and wept piteously.

"God knows," I answered, with deep emotion, "that I would help you if I could. When do you expect Mr. Devereux back?"

"Not for a month; perhaps longer."

"Is Miss Doleby with you?"

"No; she was obliged to leave me a few days before Henry appeared, to my great relief."

I again urged Melford's speedy removal, suggesting that as he was so ill, the air of the southern coast, or of a still milder climate, would be much better for him.

"What send him away to die among strangers! No, I had rather risk—"

"What? your husband's good opinion and your own fair fame? If Augustus returned and found your cousin here, he would have a right to be seriously displeased."

"A right!" she exclaimed, with flashing eyes. "No—I deny that."

"But what are your intentions then? If you do not mind braving Mr. Devereux's displeasure, how do you think Melford—"

"Devereux," interrupted Lady Clara, "monster as he is, surely would not wreak his fury on a dying man."

"But would you like to expose your cousin in his present state to—"

"Oh, no, no!" she exclaimed.

"Then," said I, "there is but one alternaive."

"Come down and talk to Henry himself," she returned. "But now I look at you, you are ill and weak. How selfish I am to have spoken of nothing but my own affairs!"

With her usual kindness, she relieved me of my travelling dress, and made me lie down. Indeed, I was scarcely able to stand.

"How kind of you to come when so little able to bear a journey," she exclaimed, as she applied *Eau-de-Cologne* to my throbbing temples.

"If I could only think my coming will be of any use—any real use to you," I faltered.

"It is—it must be," she replied. "There is comfort and support in your presence; and Heaven knows I need both. But calm yourself, dear girl."

Some refreshment was presently brought me in my room, so that it was evening before I again saw Melford. I perceived that he was indeed in an alarming state, but not, I thought, so ill as both Lady Clara and himself seemed to imagine. His complexion was wan, and he was thin and extremely weak, but he had no cough or fever. Towards Lady Clara he manifested the same devotion as ever; and though he spoke not of love, his eyes, which would light up with tenderness as he gazed at her, spoke a language more eloquent and more dangerous than words.

CHAPTER III.

I ENDEAVOUR TO STEM THE TORRENT.

Melford, I found, was staying at the village inn, though he passed the whole day at Thorne Hurst.

I had no spirit for a contest the first evening of my arrival. The three or four following days he was more unwell, being scarcely able to get from the inn to his cousin's with the assistance of his favourite and attached native servant, who had accompanied him from India. It seemed cruel to lecture him, and thus matters went on until the sixth morning, when, on coming down to breakfast, I found Lady Clara much perturbed.

She had just received a letter from Devereux, in which he announced the satisfactory conclusion of part of his business. He desired to hear from her shortly, and requested an exact account of all that she had been doing, and every one whom she had seen. The time of his return was uncertain, it might be almost directly, or it might be delayed some weeks.

"What is to be done?" said Lady Clara, anxiously.

"Something must be done," I replied, "and the sooner the better."

We had another argument, which ended no more satisfactorily than the previous one. I resolved to appeal to Melford himself.

Accordingly, when we were alone together that day, studiously avoiding anything that might offend him or hurt his feelings, I opened the subject.

"I feel the truth of all you say," he answered, frankly, "and thank you for the kind manner in which you have spoken. Had I not known that my days were numbered, believe me, I would never have come here. As it was, I came but with the intention of taking one last look at the only being dear to me on earth, and then retiring to some solitary spot to linger out the brief remnant of my existence. I admit that it would have been better if I had fulfilled my intention; but Devereux's absence, my cousin's sorrow, my increased illness, made me weak—I yielded to temptation and remained. Hard indeed must be the heart that would deny to a poor wretch like myself, prematurely stricken down in the prime of life, the consolation of being cheered in his last hours by the presence of his only relative—but fear not. For Clara's sake, I would not that Lord Bluebeard should find me in his castle."

"And where will you go?" I asked.

"It matters little," he answered, dashing a tear from his eyes. "A man can die anywhere. As soon as Devereux announces his return, I promise faithfully to quit the neighbourhood."

"But are we sure he will announce his return before hand?"

Melford started.

"What, justify his *soubriquet* of Bluebeard to the very letter?" he asked. "By Heaven, that would not be pleasant though! I should be driven to hide in an anti-chamber or a closet like the people in comedies."

"I do not like to hear you joke on this

subject, Captain Melford," I rejoined, gravely, but kindly. "Though even in the comedies you allude to, such imprudent conduct usually deprives the lady of her reputation."

Melford looked more serious.

"It is the thought of her that unnerves me," he replied. "If it were not for her, Devereux might discover and shoot me like a dog if he were so disposed. It would save me from what I have always dreaded, the lingering pangs of disease."

I suggested that his illness might not be hopeless.

"Do you really think so?" he asked, looking at me earnestly.

"I do indeed," was my answer. "I have perhaps seen more of illness than most persons of my age, and yours does not seem to me like a hopeless case. Have you consulted any physician of eminence?"

"Not since I left India. I thought it useless, and have implored Clara to suffer me to die in peace. I have a horror of doctors."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because—I hardly know. I never was ill before—and I have a prejudice against them."

"Are not Drs. W—— and B—— (I mentioned two or three physicians of our mutual acquaintance) most agreeable men, independent of their professional skill? And were you not yesterday agreeing with Lady Clara and myself that more humanity and kind feeling is found in the medical profession than perhaps in any other?"

"True, true," said Melford; "I was hasty and unjust. But I think I understand my own case as well as any of them."

"Ought not men who devote their lives to the study of a science," I asked, "to understand it better than other people?"

"I suppose they ought. Well, as you will; though I fear I am past the aid of medicine."

This conversation was reported by me to Lady Clara; and one of the first physicians in London sent for that very day.

The afternoon brought him, and he confirmed my hopes.

Melford, who had believed his lungs to be incurably affected, seemed to receive new life from the assurance that such was not the case; that his illness chiefly proceeded from debility and the effects of climate; that his constitution, though, impaired, was not destroyed, and that he might, if he could once rally, enjoy years of tolerable health and comfort.

It happened that Doctor E——was an old friend of our family, and I had some years ago known him well. During a few minutes' *tete-à-tete* that we chanced to have before he visited the patient, he gathered something of the truth, and I saw that his quick and comprehensive mind at once understood the whole affair.

It was with great pleasure that I heard him, both to Lady Clara and Melford, recommend the invalid's immediate removal to Devonshire, assuring us that if he travelled by easy stages, the journey would be rather beneficial than hurtful.

The next day the young officer departed. His spirits were better than I had expected. He had asked and received permission to see his cousin again when he was restored to health, on condition that Lady Clara and I fixed the time and place.

"As to my plans for the future," he said, "it will be time to think and speak of them when my recovery is certain. How strange and unaccountable are the feelings of us mortals! A year ago I wished for death. Now that I have been face to face with the King of Spectres, the hope of returning to life and health affords me unmixed pleasure; the certainty that I shall see you again is happiness worth wrestling with life for."

I was rejoiced to hear him speak thus; and augured well of the effects of this illness on his character. It would lead him, I trusted, to take a more just and serious view of life, and that he would be henceforth a more thoughtful and a better man. I imagined him returning after the lapse of a few months, sobered and improved; looking back with regret, and something of shame, at his former state of feeling; ready to enjoy the precious gifts of youth, health, and fortune; and to perform his part in the world with credit and distinction.

Lady Clara was supported by the same persuasion; and her sorrow at losing his society was softened by having me with her for some time.

We were both dull and low-spirited the day of Melford's departure. I saw Lady Clara's eyes fill with tears as she looked at the sofa the poor fellow had so lately occupied, and pictured him alone and cheerless.

"It is a sad thing to have no friend near one," she observed. "I mean a real friend, of which there are so few in the world. When Augustus is with me, I feel more solitary and friendless than when I am alone."

"Miss Doleby is not a very congenial companion," I observed, wishing to prevent her from dwelling on this subject.

"Miss Doleby is mournful and depressing—but nothing (and she shuddered) is like the chill of Devereux's presence. I cannot describe its effect upon me."

There was a pause; and then to change my companion's thoughts, I proposed that we should sing. But this too painfully recalled poor Melford, to whom we used to sing softly in the twilight hour, and Lady Clara could not proceed beyond a few notes. I persuaded her to take a walk. The evening air was refreshing and agreeable, and I had the pleasure of seeing her spirits greatly revived.

We had rambled some distance from the house, when the name of a village mentioned by Lady Clara struck me as familiar, and I remembered that my old nurse had gone there to reside with her brother, who was a farmer.

On mentioning this, and my wish to see my nurse again, Lady Clara willingly consented to extend our walk. I was much pleased to find my old friends in flourishing circumstances, while the kind-hearted people were delighted to see me, and pressed me to come and pass a few weeks at the farm, as I had once promised to do.

"It would make us so happy," said my dear old nurse, "for you and Master Percy always seem like my own children. I know you don't mind things in our plain, homely way, and we can give you cream and home-baked bread, and new-laid eggs; and you shall have the oak parlour all to yourself to write in."

After passing an hour very agreeably at the farm, we turned our steps homeward. I thanked Lady Clara for having amiably entered into the feelings and affairs of my humble friends, whose hearts she had evidently won.

On the way we had much earnest conversation, from personal topics going on to discuss more general ones.

On our return to the house we went to see Frederic, who, though somewhat improved in health, was still very delicate. He was in bed, but not asleep, and as he seemed restless and unwilling that we should leave him, I, with Lady Clara's permission, wrapped him in a shawl, and carried him down stairs to the library, where we were going to have a light supper.

"How fond he is of you, dear child!" said Lady Clara, with glistening eyes, looking at the little fellow as he lay on my lap. "I dread Mr. Devereux's return also on his account, for I can no longer have him constantly with me, as hitherto. Poor Henry always liked the boy."

"Where is cousin Henry?" asked Frederic. "I hope he will come back."

"Some day, perhaps," answered Lady Clara, suppressing a sigh. "You must be thankful that Evelyn is still with us."

The child clung to me. Lady Clara was a devoted mother. However occupied or agitated she was, she never forgot or neglected her boy. Often when I visited her in London, I used to miss her, and on seeking, discover her by the side of her child, playing with him, or teaching him. It had been so since I came to this place. Even Melford's illness had never distracted her attention from Frederic, and the child on his part showed a consideration for her very unusual to his years; never complaining, as many children do, for the sake of being pitied, but bearing his illness like a man, or rather like a woman, lest she should be grieved to see him suffer.

We were sitting thus when a servant

brought in a letter, which had come when we were out walking. Lady Clara turned pale, and the letter fell from her hands. It was from Devereux, announcing his return on the morrow!

CHAPTER III.

THE BANE OF DOMESTIC HAPPINESS.

"You will not leave me, Evelyn!" was Lady Clara's first exclamation on receiving this intelligence. "I cannot—dare not meet him alone!"

"I would not leave you," said I, "if my presence could do you any good. But consider—Mr. Devereux knows not of our intimacy. Recollect all that I told you when you first proposed that we should be friends—"

"Evelyn," said Lady Clara, rising, and laying her hand on my shoulder, "your cheek flushes—you tremble. What is it that thus agitates you!"

"A feeling which has often agitated me before," I answered, "which made me most reluctant to accept your friendship. It seemed to me then—the conviction is still stronger now—that in being with you thus, I am guilty of deceiving your husband."

"Nay," said Lady Clara, "if there be any deceit, the blame rests with me. "You shake your head. At least, has not the good you have done more than balanced the wrong? But for your influence, I should never have had strength to—to—"

She paused and turned quickly away, but a moment afterwards resumed. "Suppose I were to confess all—to tell him what a wise and true friend you have been—how deeply he has wronged your character?"

"And would he either forgive or believe you?" I asked. "No, you would only make matters infinitely worse than they are."

Lady Clara sighed deeply.

"Are you convinced of the truth of what I say?" I asked earnestly, taking her hand. "Do you believe that no selfish feeling—no weakness of my own heart—would make me shun this meeting, if I thought I could do you good?"

"I do believe it," said Lady Clara, warmly. "But what shall I do without you? I feel as if, fortified by your presence, I could bear all. But alone, I fear—"

She pressed her hands to her face, and retiring to a little distance, sat down with her back to me. In a few moments I heard a stifled sob.

Laying the child gently on a sofa, I went up to her.

"What do you fear, dearest Clara?" I asked.

She wept more bitterly, but made no answer.

"A strange dread—a presentiment of evil hangs over me," she at length replied. "I fear myself—I fear my own heart. When I reflect that I am united by bonds, which death only can sever, to one who is like a dark cloud on my destiny—when I think that the whole remainder of my life must be passed in the same fitful fever of disquietude and suffering, I feel sometimes as if I had not strength of mind to bear it. I have now ceased to hope—you even must have ceased to hope that the prospect will ever brighten; as yet the gloom has but become deeper and deeper.

Do you wonder that I shrink? Still young—still fresh in heart and feelings—

say, if you can, that mine is not a fearful doom! The prisoner condemned unjustly to languish in a dungeon, is not so hopelessly wretched, for he may escape, his chains are visible and material, and *may* be broken without shame—but mine—viewless, fragile, which I could rend asunder at any moment, cannot be burst without eternal dishonour!"

I ventured to suggest that matters might have been worse; that Devereux might have been a gambler or an immoral character.

"Would that he were!" exclaimed Lady Clara, passionately; "there would then be something to pity and forgive; and he would love and prize me for my compassion and tenderness; there might then be hope that he would at last turn from the world, and from his vicious pursuits, to seek for consolation and happiness in his home and his wife; but as it is, the consciousness that he is free from all base and degrading vices, serves but to harden his heart. If a man be a profligate or a gamester, the world immediately enlists on the side of his wife, she is justified in quitting his roof—if, on the contrary, his moral character is irreproachable, and he lives respectably and within his income, he may break his wife's heart with domestic tyranny, and the world, if she complains or leaves him, will take his part, and uphold him as an injured man. I believe that many a man whom the world judges leniently, because his faults are only faults of temper, will have much more to answer for at the Great Tribunal than those who, with a good heart and kindly nature are universally condemned and despised for some, perhaps, not ungenerous failings."

"Yet I have always believed," said I, "that if there is strong attachment, a bad temper need not produce unhappiness."

"Oh! Evelyn," exclaimed Lady Clara, with emotion, "discard that belief for ever—it is one which has ruined the peace and broken the hearts of thousands of our sex! How often do we hear the phrase 'It is only temper.' *Only temper!* Believe me it is not violent passions or glaring vices, in nine cases out of ten, which make the unhappiness of married life. No—it is that curse of human existence, that bane of domestic felicity—Temper!"

She paused a moment, and then added—

"It is fearful to think how large a portion of the happiness or misery of one fellow creature is placed in the power of another. Augustus for instance, with much that is noble and generous in his character, with high talents and great intellect, with no habitual vice and many virtues, how many lives has he not blighted? Yours, mine, that of his own mother, of my cousin—that child's probably, if he lives, poor darling!'

There was a long pause, and then Lady Clara said, as if pursuing a train of ideas in her own mind—

"Sometimes I think that we are neither happier nor better for continuing thus the slaves of custom, prejudice, conventionality—that if we had only strength of mind to throw off our fetters——"

"These are dangerous doctrines," I observed, "if I rightly understand the sense in which you use the words 'custom, prejudice, conventionality,' as meaning not trivial usages, but moral obligations. If by fetters you mean solemn vows and sacred ties, strength of mind consists not in breaking, but in resisting temptation to break them."

"Evelyn," faltered Lady Clara, "wicked thoughts will sometimes enter my heart, which I shudder to recall afterwards. I utter them to you, but as I would commune with my own spirit. Do not think the worse of me——"

"*I* think the worse of you," I repeated, much affected; "I who have so many more faults than you, and who have had so much fewer trials and sufferings."

She threw her arms round me, and emotion made us both, for a time, silent.

Presently she said—

"By this time to-morrow you will be far away from me, and I shall be alone with—my evil genius."

"Stay," I exclaimed, as a sudden thought struck me. "Instead of going with Mrs. Stanley to Brighton, as my mother has given me leave to do, I will accept my nurse's invitation, which I shall like much better, and thus I can be near you, and see you frequently for some time to come."

Lady Clara's eyes brightened with pleasure.

"But can you really give up the gaieties of Brighton," she asked, "and take up your abode in an old, lonely farm-house, with no one to speak to but your nurse?"

"I cannot claim the merit of a sacrifice," I answered, cheerfully; "for I make none. The solitude of the old farm-house is far more congenial to my tastes and feelings, than the life of that sea-side London. To pass the day in dressing, shopping, driving eternally up and down a dusty, glaring parade, the evening in lounging about hot rooms, exchanging vapid nothings with insipid people, who glory in their insipidity because it is fashionable, who endeavour sedulously to repress all emotion, to quench every spark of genuine feeling and originality of character, whose pride it is to lose their individuality, and become one of a mass; to live thus, feeling constantly that one's mind is degenerating and sinking to a level with the frivolity around—contrast this with the calm hours of silent commune with our own thoughts, of earnest and ennobling labour, or the absorbing study of those mighty works in every line of which we feel the presence of genius; able, when study tires, to wander amidst woods and fields, viewing nature in all her loveliness. Compare these two, and say if I shall not be greatly the gainer?"

"I wish that I could enjoy solitude as you do," said Lady Clara. "I am convinced that the more resources we have within ourselves, the less we are dependent upon external circumstances for interest and amusement, the better it is for us."

"But you have resources within yourself," I said.

"I am too much influenced by circumstances," she answered.

"And who is not?" I returned. "Under the pressure of some events it is impossible to exert oneself. But let us hope that for you brighter times are in store."

"Never—never, as long as I am Mr. Devereux's wife!" exclaimed Lady Clara, passionately.

She then sunk into a gloomy state from which I found it impossible to rouse her during the rest of the evening; though she smiled faintly once or twice at my efforts to amuse her, and when I alluded to my departure, burst into tears.

It made me miserable to leave her thus; and after I had carried Frederic back to bed, we sat in her dressing-room till the night was far advanced. I scarcely know why we kept this vigil, for Lady Clara in the country usually retired to rest early; but on the present occasion she seemed unwilling that I should quit her.

I thought I had never seen her look so beautiful; her long hair loosened from the bands which had confined it, falling in thick, glossy masses over the classic-looking folds of her white robe; the unusual paleness of her face giving a sculpture-like beauty to its chiselled and perfect features. I sat gazing at her, while a deep sense of her unhappiness pressed upon my heart, and filled my eyes with tears.

She perceived my emotion, and said—

"You also are melancholy. For myself I cannot for a moment shake off the load of depression under which I labour. If I feel thus when I have you with me, and when he is still away, how shall I feel when—when I have so much more to bear?"

"The depression of our spirits," I answered, "is not always proportioned to the heaviness of our misfortunes. I have all my life suffered at intervals from profound melancholy, which depended in no degree upon external causes."

"Yes," said Lady Clara, "melancholy with you is deeply rooted and constitutional. But with me it is different. I am not naturally of a melancholy temperament. I am only sad when under the influence of present or impending sorrow. I feel, and I cannot shake off the idea, as if I was approaching some fearful crisis of my fate."

I endeavoured to argue away this impression with but little success. Although I took care to disguise my feelings, I could not help being impressed and chilled by her words. However we may despise or affect to despise presentiments, either in ourselves or others, however true it may be that such presentiments frequently fulfil themselves, it is impossible to feel, or to hear that one whom we love feels a solemn conviction, a dread foreboding of coming evil, without a deep and undefinable terror.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Lady Clara, half fearfully, after a long pause.

"Of some lines of Cecil Courteney's," I answered.

"Can you repeat them?"

I gladly complied with her request, thinking to divert her mind, if only for a short time, from dwelling on her own situation.

"For which of us can say that from the clouds
That darken o'er our destiny and hide
The lowering future from our aching sight
Some shadows may not fall upon our hearts
To warn us, though too vainly, of our doom?

* * * * *

As on the tempest, or the earthquake's eve,
A strange portentous gloom o'erhangs the earth,
A death-like silence reigns—a fearful pause,
As though a chill had struck to the deep heart
Of Nature, and had made her breathless. Who

Shall say that sometimes for the doomed, the veil
May not be half withdrawn from the dread face
Of dim Futurity? Perhaps the approach
Of death may make us see and comprehend
Things otherwise too subtle and too deep
For our intelligence. Perhaps as we draw near
The confines of the Spirit-World, our souls
Become more spiritual.

* * * * *

Is it a strange
And secret sympathy with things invisible
About to be laid open to my view
That thrills my nerves and makes my blood run cold
With vague, mysterious terror? Yet why tremble?
Are we not now—now even in Eternity?
What we term life is but a single link,
The first—perchance the meanest in the chain
Of endless ages of existence."

"I like the lines," said Lady Clara, when I had finished. "I have often observed that there is a soothing influence in poetry. It changes the current of our thoughts, or rather raises them above ourselves, and our own individual cares and sorrows. I often think that the world is much indebted to authors."

CHAPTER V.

THE HUSBAND'S RETURN.

The first hour after midnight had pealed from the clocks in the house, with a dull dreary sound, and the hands on the time-piece, that stood on the mantel-shelf, had moved half way towards the second division of time, when the clear, sharp tone of a bell echoed through the silent halls.

We both started from our seats, the same name on the lips of each. Lady Clara clung almost convulsively to my arm, while her lips and cheeks gradually became the colour of marble. I tried to inspire her with courage, but I was scarcely less agitated, and could only utter a few incoherent and broken sentences. A louder and more impatient summons sounded, and then we heard some of the servants hurriedly descending. Lady Clara had sunk into a chair, and seemed to be on the point of fainting. As I held her hand and spoke to her, she recovered, and more by signs than words, she prayed me to ascertain if it was Devereux.

With a beating heart I advanced to the staircase, and listening intently, I heard the tones of that voice which once had been to me the sweetest music upon earth.

After giving some orders about his horse, to the groom, who accompanied him, I heard him coldly enquire if Lady Clara were well, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, observed that he supposed she had retired to rest.

"Yes, sir, long ago."

"Then I will not disturb her. Desire the east room to be prepared. How is the child?"

"Rather better, sir."

"That is well. I want nothing more. You may go. Good night."

He entered the library, and I went back to repeat this conversation to Lady Clara, dwelling on his mention of Frederic.

"He thinks it his duty to show some interest about the child," was her answer. "Thank you for your kindness, dear girl."

She accompanied me to my room, and we remained together that night, the greater part of which was passed in earnest and anxious conversation. Towards morning, Lady Clara fell asleep; I felt too miserable to rest.

What would Devereux think if he knew that I were here, under his roof, his wife's hand at this moment clasped in mine! He might learn, accidentally, though a servant—we had seen no visitors—of the fact of my staying with her. How would it rouse his anger and displeasure against her if he did; and and with what feelings of indignation, aversion, and contempt, would he—not knowing—and he never could know—my motives—have a right to regard my conduct! My cheek burned, and my heart beat quick at the thought.

And had I worked any good commensurate with this risk? Certainly if I had not come, Melford would have been now in the neighbourhood, and the consequences of Devereux's meeting him, might have been terrible. But though this immediate danger was averted, I could not but own to myself that I was far, very far from being at ease on the subject of the young officer.

True, he had spoken rationally and hopefully on the eve of departure, but I felt, I knew, that his unfortunate passion was as strong as ever. For a moment I almost wished that I had interfered to prevent another interview; but that would have seemed cruel, and the prohibition might have done more harm than the permission. I thought that I should be much happier on Lady Clara's account, when this interview was over, and yet I scarcely knew why. There had been a sort of tacit understanding that it was to be the last, but I had naturally little faith in his promises, now that experience had taught me how easily excuses were found for breaking them. In fact, I knew not what to do, and scarcely what to hope.

At one time I hesitated about remaining in the neighbourhood, for fear of discovery. But Lady Clara had such a dread of being left entirely, and seemed to place such dependence on my support and counsel, that had I been less deeply interested in her welfare I could not have reconciled it to my conscience to go far away, at a time, when, to use her own words, she seemed to be approaching the crisis of her fate. As regarded the fear of discovery, I had, as Lady Clara reminded me that night, escaped unobserved the summer when we were so much together.

Devereux's unsocial habits, his absorption in politics, his reserve and uniform avoidance of light or trivial discourse, the fact of his never speaking to a servant but to give an order, while he expected from his domestics the most rigid taciturnity in his presence, had all been in my favour, as I had previously calculated, and now I certainly incurred an infinitely less risk.

I rose rather early, and dressed without awakening Lady Clara, who slept like one worn out with exhausting emotions. I went to Frederic's room. He too was sleeping, but it was not the sound, healthful sleep of childhood. His slumber was feverish and uneasy, his parched lips moved as if from pain, and my heart ached as I marked the too transparent hue of his cheek, and saw that the contour had lost somewhat of its roundness; while there was a languor in the small hand that lay on the coverlet, which was not natural; and the hair, though soft, and of silky texture, had not the bright, crisp look of health.

Perhaps the signs of incipient disease are more perceptible in sleep than when the sufferer is awake. The varying expression of the face, the animation produced by thinking, speaking, or acting, all tend to conceal the traces which have not yet become deep or permanent, but which in sleep, when the features are uninfluenced by the soul, make themselves distinctly visible.

It is certain that I had not been previously aware of the extent of little Arundel's indisposition, though I had often played with him or held him on my lap for hours together.

As I kissed him he awoke, and as I listened to the dear little fellow's sweet voice, and watched his pretty engaging ways, I could scarcely refrain from tears.

Returning to her room I found Lady Clara nearly dressed. She looked pale and sorrowful and seemed as if she scarcely dared trust her voice to speak.

"You have been weeping," she said at length, after hearing where I had been. "Frederic seems worse?"

"No, I trust not worse," I faltered.

"Oh! Evelyn," exclaimed my unhappy companion, "if he is taken away, there will be nothing left me but to die also!"

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNSEEN WITNESS.

I HAD been about a week at the farm, where I should have enjoyed my style of life but for my constant anxiety about Lady Clara, of whom I had seen or heard nothing since the melancholy morning when I quitted her house.

It was Sunday, and I went to the little village church with the farmer's family. On coming out I was accosted by Clifton.

"Is any thing amiss, Clifton?" I asked breathlessly, seeing that she looked grave.

She replied by informing me that the day after my departure Frederic had become more unwell, that he had since grown rapidly worse, and that his mother was in the greatest distress about him. She gave me also a small, hurriedly writtten note, which contained these lines—

DEAREST EVELYN,

You must have wondered at not seeing or hearing from me; but even if my time were not entirely occupied with my poor child, Mr. Devereux is so strange, so watchful of my movements, so sternly inquisitive as to where I go, and whom I see, that I should not be able to come to you. He has not made the slightest allusion to Captain M—, but my heart is torn by anxiety—more on Henry's account than my own—lest Augustus should have heard of his return to England, if not of his late visit to this village.

"If he has, it would be more open and manly to say so. I could bear any thing better than this silent, stern severity, and the iron check that, without any apparent violence or harshness, he opposes to my freedom.

"I sometimes half resolve to ask him the cause, but the utter want of confidence between us, his chilling aspect, and my own consciousness holds me back.

"He has visited Frederic, and seemed moved by his faded looks; but the child does not like him, and cried, and would not be caressed. 'Thankless boy,' he muttered, turning rapidly away, while a dark flush crossed his cheek. 'Well, hate me if you will; it matters little.' Then addressing me he said—'I have made your son and Arundel's my heir. I would have formally adopted him, and given him my name, but that I knew that name, — although perforce your own — is hateful to you. Come, clear the cloud from your brow,' he continued, after a pause, with that fearful, half-jesting, half-serious bitterness of manner which is so peculiarly his own; 'wait patiently a few years and you will be able to change it; my constitution is fast wearing out, and you—' here he looked fixedly at me—'are not a shade less handsome than the day when I first met you.'

"Are these not words to turn to gall all the better feelings of our nature, to force wicked and rebellious thoughts into our heart, to make life one long agony?

"If you could only find some way of coming to me, Evelyn. Sometimes I feel as if my reason would give way, sometimes as if I were growing reckless—as if it mattered not whether I act right or wrong. As long as the hope remained that at some future period my boy might be a comfort and support to me, I had a motive for combatting evil thoughts, for enduring and suffering patiently, but now that the little life, with which mine is entwined, seems daily ebbing faster and faster—

"I can write no more, for my heart is bursting; and it seems selfish to ask for the only thing that could be a comfort to me—your presence."

I read this letter as we walked slowly across the fields to the farm. I resolved to go to her at all hazards; and sent a few lines by Clifton, saying that she might expect me early on the following morning.

I was fully sensible of the much greater danger I now ran of the meeting I so much dreaded. I knew, however, that Devereux was not an early riser; and that Clifton would be on the watch for my coming. That domestic met me in the park and conducted me to Lady Clara. She was in Frederic's room, trying to persuade the sick child to taste his breakfast. The young invalid smiled when he saw me, and feebly tried to hold up his face to be kissed.

"Poor mamma," he said, looking wistfully from me to her, "mamma don't eat, and mamma often cries."

"Mamma will not cry, now Evelyn is come, darling," answered Lady Clara.

"Will she stay?" asked the boy. "I like Evelyn to stay; but don't let papa come again."

His mother assured him that he should not, and then rising gave the cup she held into my hand, and left the room in tears.

Having with difficulty induced the child to swallow a few spoonfuls of bread and milk, I sat down in the chair by his bed, and complied with his request to tell him a story, by repeating one of those simple histories which children like all the better for having often heard them told before.

"Frederic," I then said, "papa loves you, and wishes to be kind to you, though he looks grave. Your saying you did not love him, the other day, made him sorry. Will you not let him come again—and say you are fond of him?"

"But I am not fond of him, Evelyn," pleaded the little boy.

"But you ought to be, darling. He is very sorry you are ill, and means to give you all his fortune when you grow up."

"I don't want it!" said the child, with a proud smile on his infant face, that recalled an expression I had sometimes seen in his mother's. "When I am grown up I mean to be a soldier, like my own papa and cousin Henry. Nurse says soldiers are the best men in the world (the nurse was engaged to marry a private in the dragoons), and then I can fight and take care of mamma. My other papa is not a soldier."

Bestowing a regret on the silly influence which nursery-maids so often exert over the minds of children, strengthening their antipathies and fostering their prejudices, or instilling pernicious notions, which may not be eradicated in all their after-lives, I gently reasoned with my young companion, and at last prevailed upon him to promise that he would, in a few days. ask to see Devereux.

I remained with Lady Clara all that day, sharing with her the care of the sick child, who did not like to be without one or other of us for a moment. At ten o'clock Clifton accompanied me home, and the next morning, soon after eight, I was again at my post in the invalid's room, or rather rooms, for a suite of three large and airy apartments were appropriated to his use.

Lady Clara made her son's illness an excuse for being very little with Devereux; indeed, the husband and wife would not have seen each other during the day, but that I urged her occasionally to go and seek him. Since his return she had dined with Frederic, but after a day or two I persuaded her to go down to dinner with Devereux. This occupied about an hour, and after my departure she usually spent about the same space of time with him, and then returned to pass the night in watching her sick child.

It gave me pain to see how much she dreaded these periods of meeting her husband, and how relieved she was when his occasional absence from home left her free.

Occasionally we read or worked, but poor Lady Clara was too anxious and unhappy to fix her thoughts long on any but the one engrossing subject, and my mind was too ill at ease to settle to regular occupation, even had the sick child left us longer intervals of leisure.

Thus passed more than three weeks, during which the poor invalid continued gradually to decline. He was wonderfully patient for so young a child; and if sometimes fretful and cross with others, never was so with his mother or me. I had not mentioned Devereux to him again, and thought he had forgotten our conversation, when one night that he had been unusually restless, and Lady Clara and I were both sitting up with him—after the first fortnight, the weather being rainy, I slept in the house—he suddenly roused from a dozing state, and asked for his papa.

Lady Clara at first thought he was wandering, but discovering that he was serious, asked me if she should send for Devereux, and I advised her to do so. It was past midnight, but he seldom retired to rest until an hour or two later. Clifton, who was our constant attendant during the day, had gone away for the night, and the nurse was taking some repose.

"I had better go to him myself," said Lady Clara. The husband and wife had not met that day, Devereux having sent to say that he was unwell, and should not dine with her. However, in her anxiety about the child, she did not seem to think of the probability of finding him more gloomy than usual; but before she went, she said—

"Evelyn, I wish that you should hear what passes. Go into the next room, your sleeping apartment, and leave the door ajar as it is now."

"Not for the world," I exclaimed. "Do you think that I would thus play the part of a listener, a spy, a—"

"I know all you would say," interrupted Lady Clara, with a mournful smile; "but do you think, dear child, that I would propose your doing anything dishonourable? Mary, if she happened to be up, might be present at this interview, if by so formal a name we call a five minutes' visit of a father-in-law to a little sick child."

"But why then—" I commenced.

"Because I wish it," said Lady Clara, decidedly. "I wish you to witness, or at least to hear, his manner towards myself, of which I feel that my words have never conveyed an adequate idea. No," she added, preventing me from saying more. "I am very tractable when you rule me, and in this instance you must submit to my will."

She took my hand and led me into the next room, then hastened down stairs. My heart beat so violently that I was forced to sit down. A very long interval seemed to elapse, I believe, in reality, it was not more than a few minutes, and then I heard a well-known step approach.

If Lady Clara wished to impress me with Devereux's unkindness, the first words he uttered had not at least that tendency.

"Good God, how he is altered!" I heard him exclaim, in a voice that betrayed great emotion. "Frederic, is it your own wish to see me to-night?"

"Yes, papa," was the faint and scarcely articulate answer. "I was a naughty boy when you saw me before, but I won't be so again. And take me in your arms and kiss me, papa, for I love you now."

"God bless you, boy," faltered Devereux, as he raised the child in his arms.

"And may He bless you, Augustus," sobbed Lady Clara, quite overcome, "for your kindness to him!"

A groan broke from Devereux's lips—a groan of acute and sudden agony, that must have smitten Lady Clara's heart as well as mine, for she recoiled several paces, and then returning, clung to his arm. I fancied I could read his feelings, which Lady Clara, not having the same clue, of course could not, and I have since learned that I was right.

The fatal and ever-haunting remembrance of his crime suggested the dread thought—"May not the blessing implored for the son by the father's MURDERER, prove a curse instead!"

The child, frightened, I suppose, by his looks, uttered a faint cry.

"Poor infant," said Devereux, "think not that I mean aught ungentle towards you; no—if my worthless life could save yours, heaven is my witness I would gladly yield it up this instant!"

He returned the child to the arms of his mother, who replaced him in his cot, and stood still in an attitude of deep dejection.

I was now gazing on the group from my retreat, under the influence of that species of feeling with which I imagine most people have, at some period of their lives, watched the progress of a deeply-interesting drama; all sense of personal identity lost, every faculty absorbed in the scene passing on the stage; knowing no passions, conscious of no emotions, but those which agitate the actors.

I longed to see the wife turn tenderly to her husband with a word or look of pity for his sorrows and remorse. But I was disappointed. Fear or doubt, or the dark recollection of similar overtures roughly rejected on previous occasions, seemed to restrain her. Frederic first broke silence.

"Be kind to poor mamma," he said, in a plaintive and imploring voice, raising his eyes, in which seemed to burn a light that was not of earth.

"It has been, and shall be my future study to be kind to her—so help me Heaven!" was the solemn answer.

Lady Clara regarded him with a fixed stony look, as if his words were scarcely intelligible to her. I could see the expression of her countenance, but not that of Devereux's, which had not once been turned towards me.

After a few minutes' the whole attention of both was fixed upon the child, in whom, as I could see, even from the distance at which I was, a startling change had taken place. An ashy hue was stealing over his countenance, and his breath came in gasps, and at longer and longer intervals. Lady Clara held one of the little wasted hands in hers, and gazed at the dying child in speechless woe.

A deep silence prevailed; and death, who often, when his mission is to the young and innocent, lays aside his terrors, wore his gentlest aspect as he approached the lovely boy, for no sign of pain or suffering marked his last moments; but as he lay, with half-closed eyes, a rapt smile broke over his features, as though glimpses of a brighter world were already revealed to him. The smile remained; the breath came more and more slowly; at last it ceased altogether.

Then a cry of agony ran through the apartment. My heart beat thick, and the scene swam before my eyes. When I could look again, the childless mother was clasped in her husband's arms, and his lips were pressed to her cold pale cheek. A few moments more, and several attendants came hurrying in, roused by that fearful shriek; Devereux consigned his now senseless charge to their care, imprinted one kiss on the forehead of the little corpse, and vanished.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED TRIAL AND AN UNWELCOME GUEST.

I WILL not dwell on the painful scenes of the next long, miserable week. The day following poor little Arundel's death, Devereux was indisposed, Lady Clara went to him, and offered to nurse and stay with him. He thanked her; but said that he was better alone. He was so unhappy and ill that he should but make her worse.

"He feels the child's death," she said, "more than I imagined possible. But, then, why will he not share my grief—why not allow me to comfort him?"

"Persevere," I said, "go to him again presently. His pity and tenderness were awakened yesterday by the sight of your distress."

"But no such impressions are permanent with him. Dear Evelyn, desist; for as well might you attempt to bring the poles of the earth together as to render Augustus and myself anything towards each other but—what we are. If he throws me off at such a time——"

A burst of weeping cut short the sentence. She laid down on her bed, and gave way to grief. Discouraged and disheartened, she would not seek Devereux again that day. How deeply I felt for him! I could imagine how this death had awakened the remorse which never long slumbered, the agonising memories of the past, to which a fresh sting was added, now that the power was taken from him of being a second father to the child he had rendered fatherless. How I regretted more than ever that he had sorrows which his wife could never share or soothe!

The next day, by my earnest advice, she again sought him; but although he thanked her for coming, he repeated his wish to be alone for a few days, and I agreed with her she had better not attempt to see him again until the day of the funeral.

Her grief fer the loss of her child was violent and overpowering. Watching and anxiety had told upon her health; she would scarcely taste food, and I could not persuade her to quit her room. She could not bear that I should leave her for a moment, nor was I inclined to do so; for I loved her with a deep, and still increasing affection.

She would listen for hours while I read from that Book, to whose pages, often neglected in the flush of health and prosperity, we gladly turn when the clouds of sickness or sorrow have darkened our horizon.

The day of the funeral, at which Devereux was, of course, the chief, and with exception of the medical man who attended the family, the only mourner, the husband and wife saw each other for a few minutes.

Lady Clara told me that Devereux seemed in a subdued and sorrowful mood, that he had alluded, with much feeling, to her loss, and expressed a kind concern about her health; offering to take her, in two or three weeks' time, to any place she chose, for change of air and scene. She thanked him, as well as she was able for tears, but said that she had heart, for the present, remain at Thorne Hurst.

He had then informed her that urgent business rendered his presence in town indispensable; that he should leave home the following day, and be absent three weeks, during which time, in order that she might not be lonely, his aunt would stay with her. On Lady Clara's saying she would rather be without the company of Miss Doleby, he replied that he had already written to that lady, and that she would arrive the next day.

When she heard this, Lady Clara burst into tears, and said that her wishes ought first to have been consulted.

"I consulted what was most for your good," Devereux answered, gravely, and fixing his eyes on her face, while the expression of his countenance darkened. "For your good," he repeated, slowly and emphatically, "and—for mine!"

"I had not the courage," continued Lady Clara, "to ask what he meant by these strange words; I felt too conscious; and yet, why should I? I am not culpable. I cannot but infer," she resumed, after a pause, "that he has heard of Melford's return; and if so, why not tell me openly, instead of making dark insinuations?"

"He wished to spare your feelings perhaps," I suggested.

"Spare my feelings!" she repeated with a bitter laugh. "His method of doing so is singular. And then to place that detestable old woman as a spy upon my actions! He will find perhaps, to his cost, that he had better have trusted me!"

I endeavoured to persuade her not to view the matter in this light, and observed that though a dull and dismal companion, Miss Doleby was kindhearted and estimable.

"She may be," returned Lady Clara; "but I had hoped that you and I should, for this short period, have been left in peace. Yet this is conduct worthy of Devereux."

"I am deeply disappointed," said I, "but is it not possible that Mr. Devereux, not knowing you have any friend near you, may really think that his aunt's society will prevent you from being lonely?"

Lady Clara who though dressed, was lying on her bed, turned partly away from me, and shaded her face with her hand. Thinking that the light hurt her eyes I rose from my seat by her side and partially drew the window curtain. As she did not speak for some time, I asked anxiously if she felt unwell; and then perceived that she was weeping.

"What is the matter, dearest friend?" I enquired.

It was some time before she replied, at length she faltered out—

"The worst of all is that—that—"

"What?" I asked earnestly.

"That you always take the part of Augustus," she sobbed, "and think him right and me wrong."

I was so consternated at this unexpected and unjust accusation that it was some moments before I could reply. At length I said, in a voice which I vainly endeavoured to render calm, that I thought my conduct might have shown that such were not my sentiments.

"Then—then," she said, "you merely defend him, and think it right that his aunt should come because—as I have sometimes lately half dreaded—I have in some way or other weakened your friendship—I am too great a tax and burden to you—and you naturally enough wish to—to leave me now, Evelyn!"

"What have I said or done to make you think thus?" I asked in a trembling voice.

"Nothing—nothing," she answered hastily. "You are kind—too kind to me."

"How can I prove that you are in error!" I exclaimed. "If you could see my heart—if you could know the deep and—to me the words and feelings are sacred—the sister's affection with which I love you—if you knew how cruelly your words have wounded me, you would not—"

Painful emotion choked my utterance.

"Forgive me—Oh! forgive me Evelyn!" cried Lady Clara; in an agony of repentant sorrow. "I have been unjust—ungenerous—ungrateful. My temper must be injured by my recent sufferings, and my spirit, already broken, overcome by the thought of again losing you, my only true friend on earth, or I should never have spoken as I did!"

She held out her arms, and in a moment I was folded to her breast, feeling, as I sobbed out repeated assurances of affection, that I loved her if possible still better for this our first and, I trusted, last misunderstanding.

These various occurrences forced upon my mind thoughts which had of late often disturbed me.

Lady Clara was growing every day more accustomed to my society; and peculiar circumstances had strengthed our attachment, until I had become almost necessary to her.

The thought of a separation made her miserable, and I could not without great pain think of the future.

It was evident that the present state of things could not long continue, even had not the visit of Miss Doleby intervened. Circumstances had hitherto favoured our intercourse in an extraordinary degree, but this could not be expected much longer. The Devereuxs were going as usual to Scotland to spend Christmas; the following spring probably to the continent, and when or how were we to meet again?

I half reproached myself for not having foreseen these contingencies long ago; since it seemed that we had only commenced a friendship to endure the pain of breaking it off.

These thoughts caused me great disquietude; especially as it was probable that Miss Doleby would be always the companion of Lady Clara when her husband was from home, in which case I could not come to cheer or watch over her at those times, as I might otherwise have done.

Had Miss Doleby been a different sort of woman, like Mrs. Devereux for instance, with a mind and heart to sympathise with Lady

Clara, I should have been consoled by thinking that the latter had a companion on whom she might lean for support and advice; I should have felt a sense of security as regarded her; but Miss Doleby though high principled and worthy, was slow of comprehension, interested herself little in the feelings or affairs of others, and with all her merits, would, I could not but feel, make Lady Clara's home more cheerless and uncomfortable than it already was.

I anxiously and minutely considered Lady Clara's position. When I knew her but slightly I thought that she was satisfied with the pleasures of society and the world; and that while she could lead a gay fashionable life she cared for little besides; but I had wronged both her heart and intellect. She had enjoyed, and might still enjoy amusements and society, she had been, and still might be, sensible of admiration, but she had had as much of all three as could well be crowded into the life of one individual not older than she was, and these pleasures, like all others, will, at length, pall even on their most devoted followers.

Most people, however worldly, seek, at some period of their lives, for an object of permanent attachment, some human being on whom they may bestow their affection, with a reasonable hope of return. This feeling is usually the strongest, when pleasure or ambition beginning to weary, a void is felt in the heart, which something more substantial than these two phantoms is required to fill.

Lady Clara's was a heart which could at no time be really happy, without loving and being loved, though it was not till lately that the want of some object to which to attach herself strongly, had been urgent. Disappointed in the hope of finding that object in her husband; the brother and sister-like attachment which might have existed between herself and Melford was effectually prevented by her cousin's falling in love with her; robbed by death of a beautiful and interesting child who might have proved the pride and delight of her existence, she was truly much to be pitied. And now she could only see the friend whom she loved, by stealth and at long intervals; the friend who having, through peculiar circumstances, become acquainted with the dark and strange incidents of her own and her husband's previous history, which were known to no other human being, possessed an influence over her, and a capability of advising and sympathising with her, that no one else had or could have.

The unwelcome visitor wrote on the morning of the day she was expected, to say that she should not reach Thorne Hurst until the following day.

"A short reprieve," said Lady Clara, pressing my hand.

Resolved to make the most of this reprieve, I persuaded her, for the first time, to descend to the drawing-room, and to walk in the garden; and as I expected, the change, the fresh air, and the slight exertion she was compelled to make, produced a good effect.

I had the pleasure of seeing her take some food with apparent relish, and in the evening, as we sat by a cheerful fire, which the chillness of the latter part of November rendered very agreeable, I read to her for an hour or more, and she listened with interest.

Presently we both became silent and thoughtful; Lady Clara drew close to me and her head rested on my shoulder; while my arm was round her waist. I felt that she was weeping; and my own heart overflowed with emotion, at the thought that this was, perhaps, the last time we should be thus together.

"You are sorry to leave me then, dearest Evelyn?" said Lady Clara, mournfully, but with great tenderness.

"If you knew how deeply so," I faltered.

"Listen," she resumed, more cheerfully than I had heard her speak for a long time, "I will tell you a thought that has been in my mind all the evening. You think well of Augustus' aunt. Can we not trust her?"

At first I started at the idea, but soon recollected that she had not shared Devereux's opinions in regard to authors, and that she had kindly told me she regretted the rupture of my engagement to her nephew. It was agreed, therefore, that she should be taken into our confidence.

The next morning brought a letter from Melford, to whom, by Lady Clara's wish, I had written to announce her loss. His letter was long and interesting, and the writer's whole soul was evidently overflowing with affection, kindness, and sympathy towards the person he addressed. The contrast this letter presented to one from Devereux, concerning some commission he had executed for her, was striking and painful.

When I went down to breakfast, I found her with one letter pressed to her bosom, while the other had been thrown or suffered to fall to the floor. I paused a moment to look at her, as she stood so absorbed in her own thoughts as not to perceive my entrance. Her figure was drawn proudly up to its full height, and in the heaving of the breast, on which both hands were clasped, in the curled but trembling lip, in the dilated eye, which flashed through the large tear-drops that rested on the glowing cheek like rain on some bright flower, I read the contest between passionate tenderness, wounded feeling, and indignant grief.

An involuntary sigh which I uttered, roused her, she brushed away the gathered tears, embraced me, and hastily taking up the fallen letter, placed both in my hand. No comment was made by either, except on the fact of Melford's improved health.

My companion, however, seemed restless and anxious, and all my efforts to occupy or amuse her were unsuccessful.

It was not till evening that Miss Doleby arrived. Lady Clara received her alone, and after five minutes, conference, came to my room.

"The good old lady is all that I could wish," she said, with a delighted smile. "I told her nothing of our previous intimacy, but merely said that you were staying in the neighbourhood, and that I had asked you to come to me for a few days. She said that you were a favourite of hers, and that she should be glad to see you again."

I had my doubts whether the whole truth ought not to have been told, but I said nothing then, for fear of vexing Lady Clara, and we descended together.

I could not meet one who recalled the happiest and most wretched portions of my life without emotion, and Miss Doleby received me with unusual kindness. She expressed the opinion that I was very little altered, and looking less delicate, which she said was doubtless owing to my having attended to her advice, of avoiding late hours and severe study, and keeping my mind calm. She confessed that when she last saw me she did not expect that I should live three years longer, but that she was glad to find herself mistaken. She was also, reluctantly, I thought, compelled to give up the idea of Lady Clara's lungs being affected, when she found that, a few days after her arrival, the supposed invalid, on being surprised by rain, walked in the park at the rate of four miles an hour, without inconvenience.

The ensuing fortnight passed by no means unpleasantly. Lady Clara and I walked regularly for several hours, both, after our long confinement to the house, enjoying the fresh air and exercise. During these rambles we had long conversations, often mournful certainly, but always interesting. The most perfect confidence existed between us; we laid open our hearts to each other yet more completely than we had ever before done, and became, if possible, yet more strongly attached. She listened with great interest to the "Courteney Romance," as she playfully called the history of all that had passed between our friend and me, and we had many discussions on the respective advantages and disadvantages of the married and single states. Lady Clara was (not unnaturally) greatly prepossessed in favour of the latter, and strongly advised me never to marry—even Courteney.

In the evenings we read, or worked for a poor family whom I had discovered, and Lady Clara had rescued from starvation. Miss Doleby's attention had all this time been principally occupied by nursing herself through a severe cold, although she occasionally found time to lament over our constitutions, our complexions, or our imprudence.

She had been at Thorne-Hurst more than a week, when another letter arrived from Devereux, in which he intimated a desire that Miss Doleby should, for the future, reside entirely with himself and his wife. Unless Lady Clara had any objections to make, which he could not think probable, he should, he said, consider the affair as settled.

Lady Clara's cheek crimsoned as she read.

"It shall never be!" she exclaimed; and I at first agreed that she might reasonably negative the proposal. But on what ground, was the question.

"I do not like her," said Lady Clara. "Surely that is enough."

But on maturely discussing the subject, it seemed clear that Devereux would be seriously displeased if this wish of his, expressed almost as a command, were disregarded; and also, there appeared reason to fear that he would, if his wife refused this companion, adopt some still more disagreeable means for watching over her movements, during his absence. She therefore reluctantly showed the letter to the old lady, who very readily acquiesced in the proposal, which was seconded, rather faintly, by her hostess.

The fortnight had almost elapsed, and Lady Clara, as usual, became depressed and restless at the prospect of meeting Devereux, and parting with me. But an additional, and very serious cause for sorrow, arose to us both. On the eve of my departure, Miss Doleby, in kind, though very decided terms, told us, that though she had made no objections to my being a short time with Lady Clara, and though she had herself the highest opinion of me, yet, as my visit was unknown to and unsanctioned by Devereux, it must not be repeated. Lady Clara's indignation was at first so great as to deprive her of the power of speech.

"Do you think," she asked at length, in a voice that trembled with the effort to speak calmly—"Do you think that I can allow one of my guests (she laid an emphasis on the word) to dictate to me as to the others whom I may choose to invite to my house?"

"My dear Lady Clara," said Miss Doleby, "it is far from my wish to dictate to you upon this or any other matter generally, but it is due to my nephew that no person should be your guest whose presence he would consider objectionable. In this case, and, perhaps," she added, lowering her grating and dismal voice, and laying a marked emphasis on the words, "more especially in another, you will do well to follow the advice of an older and more experienced person."

"You are enigmatical," said Lady Clara, proudly, "and I hate enigmas. Have the goodness to tell me, in plain language, what you mean? It is better we came to an understanding at once."

The old lady bent forward, and whispered—

"When we are alone."

"I have no secrets from Miss Lascelles," said Lady Clara. "She is more fully in my confidence than any other living being."

"Except your husband," said the old lady.

"With no exception. Now, pray proceed."

"As Miss Lascelles enjoys your full confidence," said Miss Doleby, looking, as I thought, malignantly at me, "she must be aware that the other person to whom I allude is your cousin, Captain Melford."

"And now tell me," said Lady Clara, with calm and dignified self-possession, "what you know against Captain Melford, and from whom you have your information?"

The old lady was a good deal disconcerted, but there was no evading these direct queries.

She was forced to confess that she knew nothing of Melford except what Devereux had told her, but would not tell us *how much* she knew, and after some further discussion, Lady Clara intimated, that as it was evident Miss Doleby and she could never be comfortable together, she must beg to retract her confirmation of the proposal that Miss Doleby should be a permanent guest.

"Just as you please, my dear," said the old lady, with provoking coolness. "I have no motive in staying with you but to oblige Augustus. Indeed, if I consulted my own inclinations, I should return to the friends I have just quitted—they have a large family of sickly children, and can ill do without me. However, I feel it my duty to warn you that you will repent my dismissal."

She would not explain herself further. All our questions on the subject, as also all Lady Clara's entreaties that she might be allowed to see me occasionally when Devereux was absent from home, were met with decided negatives, ominous shakes of the head, and declarations that principles must be adhered to on every occasion whether trifling or important.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CURB IS DRAWN TOO TIGHT.

The departure of the Devereuxs from Thorne Hurst was delayed until the middle of February, on account of some business which required Devereux's presence in that neighbourhood. Until that period I resolved to stay at the farm.

It was true I could do but little for Lady Clara, and should be able to see her but seldom. Still, seldom was better than never, and I might be of some use if not much.

Personally I was making no sacrifice, as my humble friends were delighted to have me with them, and but for my anxiety about Lady Clara I could have been happy enough.

My mornings were spent in study, with the exception of a couple of hours devoted to teaching the farmer's two little girls; the afternoons in taking long walks, accompanied by the eldest of my pupils, a pretty intelligent child. In the evenings I usually sat with the family for a time, talking or reading to them, and then retired to the pleasant sitting-room appropriated to my use, to write or read till an hour or two past midnight.

As always happens in a country village, the appearance of a stranger excited curiosity and speculation. My nurse, who was aware that I had reasons for wishing my name should not be known in the neighbourhood, by my desire told all enquirers that her visitor was a Miss Smith of London, a dressmaker come down for the benefit of her health.

An inconvenient result of this—I trust—pardonable deception, was that the clergyman and doctor of the parish offered to visit me, and several ladies kindly called. I avoided seeing any of then, and always wore a thick veil when walking out.

I was the more careful because I knew that Mrs. Hastings Allan had friends who lived within a few miles of Thorne Hurst, and I had no wish to encounter either her or her husband. The farmer's boy who took some poultry to Newlands, (as the house of Mrs. Hastings' acquaintance was called) brought word that a great deal of company had arrived, and that among the servants he had remarked a black man who was teasing a little white dog. I immediately concluded that these were Mrs. Hastings' negro servant Sambo, and the dog Wasp.

It was true other people might have black servants and white dogs, but that did not shake my conviction. Mrs. Hastings had declared that when she visited Newlands she should call on Lady Clara. Of her movements I had no definite information, because, as often happened, there was a temporary coolness between our families, owing to Mrs. Hastings' taking offence at some trifle or other; and Harry was at Heathfield.

I ought to mention that Lady Clara was now, under various pretences, closely and incessantly watched.

When she drove out Miss Doleby always went with her, and on the ground of several robberies having been committed in the neighbourhood, Devereux insisted that she should never walk out unless followed by a servant. The only plan we could devise for meeting was that once a week Lady Clara should call at the farm for new laid eggs. Miss Doleby never went into a house in winter for fear of catching cold, so that whilst she sat in the carriage Lady Clara and I had a brief conference.

Every time I saw her she seemed more and more unhappy. When I had been about six weeks at the farm she told me that she thought she could not longer endure her situation, which became every day more intolerable.

"The time is fast approaching," she continued, "when I shall not even have this short glimpse of you, my only friend and comforter—and then—then—"

She paused and added passionately.

"Eveyln, I have but one wish—that I could die!"

"Do not say so dear friend," I exclaimed, greatly distressed. "Heaven will comfort you—far—far better than I—than any human being could. At the worst—as I have often thought when this world's trials and sufferings seemed almost too great to be borne—a few short years and all will be over. And then if we have only been patient and submissive—

if we have trusted in Him 'who does not afflict willingly,' an unspeakably happy state will be ours, in which our present troubles will seem as nothing; or rather we shall then feel that they are numbered among the '*all* things' that shall work together for our good, and for which we shall thank Him through countless ages!"

Lady Clara seemed impressed for a moment.

"But it is hard to give up all hope of comfort in this world," she said mournfully.

"Nor would I have you do so," I replied tenderly. "Sources of comfort arise where we least expect them, as I know by experience; and I pray heaven such may be your case."

"I fear," said Lady Clara, "that I am less religious in sorrow than when life smiles upon me. I can feel gratitude for blessings, but I murmur at misfortunes."

"We must not mistake natural grief for repining," I said soothingly. "If we did not feel our trials they would not be such."

"But I *do* repine!" she exclaimed, "that with warm and yearning affections, domestic misery must always be my lot—I do repine at the loss of my child—my idol—Were he but restored to me I would bear all—I would cheerfully endure a doom of yet greater wretchedness—if such exist—for while his angel face was near me, grief lost its sharpest sting, and while he loved me my heart could not be desolate!"

Her tears flowed fast as she concluded.

"He loves you yet!" I said, "with a love still deeper and more perfect. He awaits with joy the hour when his beloved mother, dearer still for all that she has undergone, shall rejoin him, never again to part!"

My companion still wept, but more calmly. After a silence, she observed—

"You have known severe trials, Evelyn, but not of such a crushing character as mine. You are still free, in heart, in mind, in person—you are not irrevocably bound to a husband you detest, and by whom you are detested."

"My trials are not to be compared with yours," I replied; "but they were sufficient to teach me—ill as I have acted up to the theory, that,

"Life may have holier ends than happiness."

It is true that from some sources of suffering

I am free, while you are not; but from one far—far greater than any you have mentioned, you are as free as I am."

Lady Clara fixed her eyes upon my face enquiringly.

"From what am I as free as you are?" she asked.

"From the haunting consciousness of fatal error or wrong. Oh, dearest Clara, if you had watched, as I have, the workings of remorse, you would feel that the greatest unhappiness which we bear innocently, is light compared with the sting of a wounded conscience!"

We were here interrupted by my nurse, who came to say that Miss Doleby could not wait any longer. The colour rushed to Lady Clara's cheek.

"In not one single respect," she exclaimed, "am I my own mistress! But I will not endure it—I will—"

Indignant emotion choked her voice.

"The most abject poverty, want, sickness, drudgery, what were they to my state?" she continued. "If I could choose—"

"But we cannot choose our own lot, dearest; and, perhaps, were the power intrusted to us we should not be so successful as we imagine. But we may make all reasonable efforts to improve our condition. Stay—can you not ask Augustus boldly and openly to tell you the cause of this painful restraint, which you have done nothing to merit?"

"I will," she answered, "I will this very day."

Lady Clara came again that week, her ostensible object being to bring some little delicacies for one of the children who was indisposed.

"Augustus," she said, "received my appeal at first with his usual stern coldness, evading a direct reply, but at last he said with ill-suppressed anger—

"'I know of Melford's return to England, and of his having been a fortnight in this village. Need I say more?'

"'And you dare to distrust me on that account?' I returned, proudly.

"'How can I trust one who has practised such deception upon me?' he exclaimed, 'who invites to my house, during my absence, a man whom she dares not see in my presence—a man whose passion for her is the subject of public notoriety!'

"'They wrong him then,' I exclaimed, 'and *you* wrong us both! Until he stood before me, I never dreamed that he had quitted India. He, fully believing that he had but a few weeks to live, came to look, for the last time, on his only relative, and remained in the neighbourhood only until he could be removed with safety.'

"'Which was just two days before my return. Henry Melford manages his illnesses remarkably well. I presume he has found it agreeable to postpone his death for a short time?'

"This was said with an air of bitter sarcasm. I was about to make an indignant reply, when he interrupted me, in a voice, and with a look which I can never forget—

"'Faithlessness in word and thought, of course, I cannot prevent, but MY WIFE shall not have it in her power to disgrace herself and me—to make my name a by-word for the world's scandal—I have borne much—I can bear more—but I should sink under *that!*'

"He hurriedly paced the room, then returning, again confronted me.

"'I regret,' he said, 'to be under the necessity of doing what is disagreeable to you. There is one alternative. If you will write Melford such a letter as I will dictate, at the same time taking a solemn oath never to see or speak to him again, all restraint shall be at an end.'

"Of course," continued Lady Clara, "I indignantly rejected this proposal.

"'Being conscious of purity and integrity of heart,' I answered, 'towards my cousin as towards every one, I will make no vows which would seem to imply the contrary. Knowing his feelings to be right and honourable, I will write no unkindness or insult, for I well know that you would dictate nothing else.'

"Devereux bowed his head in haughty silence, and left the room. You look grieved, Evelyn; but could I have spoken otherwise?"

"Your answer was very natural; but, dear Lady Clara, I cannot feel the same confidence in Henry Melford that you do. I know it gives you pain to hear me speak ill of him, but was it not highly wrong to come as he did? Even had he been dying, was it not gratifying a selfish desire at imminent risk to you? Secure as Mr. Devereux ought to feel of *your* superiority to temptation, has not Captain Melford given your husband just cause to doubt *his* honour and principle?"

"Augustus has no right to doubt a friend, much less a relation of mine," said Lady Clara, proudly.

"Every one must be judged by his actions," I observed. "Even your friendship or relationship cannot set aside this test."

"But for certain considerations," said Lady Clara, very gravely, "I would brave the world's comments and insist on a separation from my husband. If ever the plea of incompatibility of temper were admissible, it surely is in our case."

"Do not, for a moment, entertain such a thought!" I exclaimed. "What would be said of you, if, under existing circumstances, you withdrew from your husband's roof? Every consideration is against such a step!"

"Every consideration, certainly," sighed Lady Clara, as she turned to depart, "excepting my happiness!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE POOR OLD MAN.

Just as Lady Clara had spoken these words, the farmer's eldest girl announced that a poor old man, who seemed in great distress, wished to speak to me immediately.

"Tell him that I shall be disengaged in a few minutes, Mary," I replied. "I suppose it is old Davies, about the letter I am to write to his son in Australia."

"No, Miss, it is a stranger."

"Well, ask him to sit down—I will see him soon."

The girl returned, saying, the old man could not wait. He wanted to see Lady Clara

Devereux, about a petition, or something of the sort.

A suspicion crossed my mind, and I think that of my companion also, for she coloured, and then turned pale.

"Had we not better say that you are not at leisure now?" I asked.

"Yes—no—I mean say whatever you please," she answered.

"He implores you not to refuse him, in the name of humanity, if you please, Lady Clara," said the girl. "He says he won't keep you five minutes; but he can only speak broken English, and wants to see some one who knows foreign languages."

"I suspect he is an imposter," said I hastily. "Dear Lady Clara, Miss Doleby will be impatient. I will undertake this troublesome old man."

There were two doors to my room; one leading through a passage to the farm kitchen, the other opening into the garden. I was about to usher Lady Clara out the last mentioned way, when the first door opened and the individual in question entered. He was apparently bent double with age; a loose overcoat descended nearly to his feet, and a shabby hat, from which hung a few locks of white hair, was pressed down over his brow till it nearly met a large woollen scarf that covered the lower part of his face. He sank into a chair, as if unable to support himself; and, more by gestures than words, implored our attention.

I saw there was no help for it, so I resumed my seat, and told Mary she might leave the room.

Lady Clara remained standing, in evident embarrassment.

"Well, my good man," I said, as neither of my companions spoke; "what is your business with us?"

The *soi-disant* petitioner replied by throwing off his hat, coat, wig, and scarf, and disclosing the form and features of Henry Melford.

"Imprudent—foolish—wrong!" burst from my lips; while the young man threw himself on one knee before Lady Clara, and attempted to take her hand.

"Say—say you are not angry with me for this," he exclaimed. "Nor you, Evelyn—her friend and mine. What, both silent—not one word of welcome or kindness?"

"Do you deserve it?" said Lady Clara, her face, however, contradicting the import of her words, "since you are here without permission?"

"But I had your promise that I should see you once more, and knowing that you were so soon going to Scotland, and that you were so unhappy, I selected this time for—"

"And you think that your coming diminishes her unhappiness?" I asked.

"Yes, Miss Lascelles," he replied, bitterly, rising and turning towards me. "I have sufficient vanity to think that the presence of so attached a friend as myself *is* some consolation to Clara!"

"Could she see you with comfort and safety I should not doubt it," I replied.

"And how was I to see her but in this way? You are ready to condemn me, Evelyn, but are you not yourself under a disguise?"

"It is true," I answered sadly; "but our cases are not parallel."

"Evelyn is right," said Lady Clara, "in saying that your presence here, at this time, adds to my sorrow. I have enough to bear without a final parting from—"

"But I am here to beg—to implore—that this may not be a final parting," cried Melford, impetuously. "That you will leave a home which is no longer a home for you—a cruel and heartless man who detests you, and seek refuge with a—"

"Not with *you!*" I exclaimed. "Captain Melford you are mad!"

"You are so," he replied, with a look of grave reproof, "if you think I would offer her any love, or any protection, but those of a brother. Is not my speaking thus openly in your presence a guarantee of—"

"It is not for me to answer you," I replied.

"Henry," said Lady Clara, with dignity, "I thought you had too much respect for yourself and me to propose a step which, although really innocent, would compromise us both in the eyes of the world."

"The world!" exclaimed Melford; "and must we always be the slaves of the world? Must we sacrifice on its altar, happiness, life, reason? Must we be miserable because we dare not brave its cavil or its sneer?"

"I do not fear the world," said Lady Clara; "but I remember that my home is not less my home because it is an unhappy one — that Augustus Devereux, whatever may be his faults, is my husband. As I have never paraded my sorrows, or complained of my state, no one has a right to—to speak to me as you have, Henry."

"But cannot the eye of affection discover the truth in spite of all disguises?" said Melford.

I looked at him as he spoke, his form had regained its graceful yet manly proportions; his cheek was once more tinged with the fresh hues of health; the thick brown hair clustered round his clear and open brow; his handsome eyes were eloquent with strong feeling; while the usually haughty and careless expression of his handsome mouth was softened into tenderness and pity.

"Will you not accept me as your brother, your protector?" he asked.

"Henry, I thought you were my true friend," faltered Lady Clara.

"I am here to prove myself so," he answered. "If you will only trust yourself to my guidance. I am told that this climate is too cold for me at present—will you—say will you share my exile—will you be my sister, my friend, my guide? I have fortune enough for both. Clara, Clara, only say the one word 'yes,' and all shall be instantly arranged. In a fortnight from this time we will be in your beloved Naples; your cares and your persecutor left far behind, and we both—instead of as now the most miserable—will be the most free, the happiest of human beings!"

"Save me, Evelyn, save me from this!" cried Lady Clara, with a look of agony.

"Save you from what?" said Melford, tenderly. "From your best friend?"

"Captain Melford is not in earnest," I interposed. "He has been reading bad French novels, which have confused his notions of right and wrong. In a fortnight he would be as sorry he had made this proposal, as you would that you had accepted it."

Melford looked at me angrily and reproachfully.

"You make me repent," he said, "that I sought her in your presence. Why should you be more clear-sighted than I am as to what my future feelings will be?"

"Because my eyes are not blinded like yours, by the mists of passion and excitement. Were our places reversed—"

I paused, for it seemed to me that a shadow darkened the window.

"We are observed," I exclaimed. "It is high time this interview should cease."

"Who should observe us?" cried Melford.

We will not part till you have told me when we meet again."

"I know not," sighed Lady Clara. "Never, perhaps, in this world."

"Will you drive me to despair ?" cried the young man, with vehemence.

"Resume your disguise and depart," said I, authoritatively.

"I cannot—I will not !" he cried. "Oh, Clara, say that you consent. Until you do I will not leave you !"

"Is this kind or generous ?" said Lady Clara.

"Why should not Evelyn accompany us ?" pursued the young officer. "Would that reconcile you to—"

"You know not what you say," I interposed. "Go home and reflect calmly."

"Reflect !" he cried. "This plan for her happiness is the result of months of anxious and earnest deliberation—and do you bid me reflect !"

I knew not what to answer; and again the light was partially obscured. I turned quickly, and opening the door, looked into the garden. I saw no one but my nurse, coming from the road where she had been talking with Miss Doleby. I waited till she came up, and heard, as I expected, that the old lady was very impatient, and had only been kept quiet so long by prescribing for one of the farm-servants who had got the ague.

"I thought you were busy," said my faithful attendant, "so I pretended to be very stupid and slow in understanding her directions."

"You did well, nurse. Hush! what is that?"

It was the sharp, querulous bark of a dog.

"Look if there is any one behind those gables, near the bee-hives," I whispered, hurriedly, and then hastened back to those I had left. Melford held his companion's hand and was speaking in low, earnest tones. I silently held towards him his over coat, hat, and white wig. He hastily put them on, saying to Lady Clara—

"Then you promise?"

She answered—

"Yes."

And an instant after, he had quitted the room by the garden door, and springing over a low fence which separated some flower-beds from a meadow, made his way to the road at a considerable distance from the place where the carriage was waiting, with an agility very little suited to his assumed character.

"'What have you promised?" I enquired, in alarm.

"Only to write to him," said Lady Clara, sighing heavily. Fear nothing, Evelyn. If I can withstand his voice and pleading looks, I—"

She left the sentence unfinished, but her meaning was plain enough. I pressed her hand, she looked wistfully in my face, and burst into tears.

"The struggle is over now," she faltered. "Not even you can know how much it has cost me."

"I am sure of it, dearest friend, and your merit is proportionately great."

"I shall show you my letter," said Lady Clara, as she was leaving the room. "He will stay for a few days at an inn called the 'Oak,' at M——; (naming a small town close to the nearest railway station). "Farewell."

CHAPTER X.

STINGS.

Lady Clara had not left me more than a few minutes, when my nurse brought in a card and said that the gentleman wished to see me.

"Tell him," I said, as I read the name of Allan, "that I see no one."

"So I told him, Miss Evelyn, but he said that was a story, for you had just seen a carriage-full of people, and besides, that he was a relation, and had a right to come in."

She had hardly finished speaking when the person in question made his way into the room.

"Miss Smith, of London, I hope I see you well," he said, with odious familiarity. "Does the dress-making trade flourish? That stock of paper there is for patterns, no doubt! Now, own," he continued, as anger and indignation kept me silent, "that I am about the last person you either wished or expected to see?"

"You are the last person I *wished* to see, certainly."

"Had you a sort of mesmeric consciousness, then, that I was near?"

"When people wish to overhear conversations, unobserved, they should not bring snarling dogs with them," "I replied, glancing at Wasp, who was whining and wagging his tail in sign of recognition.

Mr. Allan looked confused, but answered, boldly—

"When your natural guardians are far away, I considered it my duty to watch over you."

"It can be no one's duty to play the part of a spy!"

"I will tell you the plain truth of how it happened that I came here. Why that scornful smile?"

"Because I have observed that when people begin by saying they will tell the 'plain truth,' they usually conclude by telling a falsehood."

"Well, this really is the real truth, Miss Smith, or Miss Brown, I forget which is your present alias."

"I have no wish to hear you," I replied, turning away.

"Nay, but I must tell you. When I was taking my ticket at the terminus this morning, in London, a very feeble old gentleman demanded one for the same place. We were late, and I had a sharp run for it. To my surprise, the octogenarian shot past me like an arrow, and sprang into the carriage with the activity of eighteen. I observed that he was a wonderful man of his age, whereupon he turned away in high dudgeon, and muffled himself in his scarf, which his run had somewhat deranged; although the day, as you know, is oppressively close. This was not so quickly done as to prevent my seeing the outline of a cheek decidedly unfurrowed by years; and during the journey various trifling circumstances combined to make me suspect he was disguised.

"My observation of this singular individual would have ended when we alighted at M— station, where we each engaged a hired carriage

—(for my friends at Newlands did not expect me to return so early)—but for an accident. My horse fell lame, and as I had but two miles more to accomplish, I quitted the vehicle and walked on, This happened close to Devereux's place, and as I stopped a moment to look into the park, I saw the stranger prowling about and questioning some work-people Not getting a satisfactory answer, I suppose, he went up to the house; and then set off at a rapid pace down one of the roads.

"My curiosity was now really excited, I resolved to follow this singular personage, and was rewarded by discovering a very pretty little romance. At first I naturally thought that Miss Smith was the attraction; but I find my mistake. Devereux is severe enough upon other people's weaknesses, perhaps he may be rather less so when he knows all."

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed, in alarm.

"I mean there is nothing I should like better than to humble Devereux's pride, and that I think I have found out the way."

"Beware what you say or do!" I cried, "or the mischief you would cause may recoil on your own head."

"Say, rather, the mischief I would prevent;—a timely interference——"

"Mr. Allan," I interrupted, "I declare, solemnly, that you cannot utter a word against Lady Clara's truth and honour without the grossest and the basest falsehood!"

"If she is true and honourable," said Mr. Allan, sneeringly, "it is no thanks to Mr. Melville—Millbank—what is the fellow's name, I could not catch it? I may as well have my story quite correct."

"If you knew that young man's name, it would be the only thing in your confused and garbled story, that *was* correct."

"I understand everything except how *you* come to be involved in the affair."

I made him no answer; but taking up a frock that I was making for one of the children, worked in silence.

He resumed—

"I can hardly think that you would stay here merely to afford a place of rendezvous; because Lady Clara and her cavalier could get on quite as well, or, indeed, a great deal better, without you. No—it is more probable there is a double affair—and that Devereux consoles himself with an occasional visit to his first love. Very moral indeed—very!"

"Sir!" I exclaimed, rising, "either you or I must quit this room instantly."

"Nay, no offence, my pretty one. I did but jest. My wife will call upon you shortly, and introduce our friends, the Coyningtons. Nice young man—only son—will be heir to everything—wants a wife—do for you exactly. Mrs. Allan wished to call on Lady Clara. I didn't mean to go; but now I've a piece of information that is sure to make me a welcome visitor, the case is altered."

He grinned malevolently.

"And can you," I asked, "dare to face a man whom you have already so wronged, and—and——"

"And tell him that he is yet more deeply wronged by another? Yes, I can. His tenderest point is his honour and his name, and shall I not be well avenged on him for his pride—he has persisted in cutting me—and on his *protegée*, Mrs. Warrenne, for her deceit—for you know, or perhaps you don't know, that she pretended her fortune was her own, independent of her husband's control; which, as I found out when I had lavished a year's income on her, was not the case. Shall I not, I say, be gloriously avenged when I see him writhe under the thought that his own wife—ha! ha! What were ancient tortures, the thumb-screw, the rack, or roasting alive to this?"

"Monster!" I exclaimed; "but beware!

beware!" I could add no more; but turning sick with apprehension, sank upon the nearest seat.

He evidently enjoyed my distress; and after many adieus, to which I did not reply, left the room. A moment afterwards I heard a tap at the window, and pushing the casement wider open, my tormentor thrust in his head to ask if I had any commands for "dear Augustus," besides my most affectionate love. Amused at his own wit, he continued to look at me, walking backwards, and making absurd grimaces and gesticulations. He was approaching close to a stand of bee-hives, whose inhabitants the warmth and brightness of the day had called into activity.

"Look where you are going!" I called out.

He heeded me not, and the next moment his legs were in the air, and the whole angry swarm of an over-turned bee-hive flying about him. As he scrambled up and jumped frantically among the flower-beds, I fear my feelings were not so entirely compassionate as they ought to have been. I called for assistance, however, and my nurse and a servant led Mr. Allan into the kitchen, where he was hotly pursued by several of the enraged insects.

I stayed a few moments to direct what remedies should be applied, when he peevishly exclaimed, as he stamped with rage and pain—

"The horrid brutes! they only attack me. Why the deuce don't they sting some one else?"

"Because we have not provoked them. Take care," I whispered, as I passed him to leave the room, "that you do not provoke mental stings more severe than those physical ones you are now suffering from!"

"Pooh, pooh," he muttered; "I go to sting, not to be stung! If you will be allegorical, Devereux overturned my beehive long ago, and—confound it! I can't talk;—I wish these bees, and you too, had all been at Jericho!"

CHAPTER II.

CALUMNY.

For the next three days I was so anxious that I could scarcely take either food or rest, and employment was out of the question. I wandered listlessly about the fields and lanes absorbed in thought; my mental uneasiness increased tenfold by the vague nature of my fears, and my utter helplessness.

On the third evening, it happened that, accompanied only by a large pointer, I walked as far as one of the gates of Thorne-Hurst. I paused for some minutes, gazing at the house, of which, as I stood on higher ground, and the distance was not more than half a mile, I had a clear view.

I was roused from a reverie by the distant tramp of a horse. It ceased, and I fancied it could not have been real. In a short time, however, I was startled by the sight of a horseman, nearing the brow of the little hill. Knowing the grounds, I conjectured he had ridden through a copse, which shortened the distance two-thirds, though affording a steep and rough bridle-road. I say startled, for the first brief glimpse showed me that the rider was Devereux. He was mounted on his favorite black horse, which I had named Ravenswood. I could have recognised the animal's step anywhere.

Drawing quickly back, I sprang over a stile on the opposite side of the road. From behind the hedge I watched to see him, myself unseen. After passing through the gate he rode, very slowly, looking at something in the direction of the stile, so that his face was turned full towards me. That face ! how changed since I first saw it ! Toil, and thought, and anxiety, the world's wear and tear, were stamped on the brow and features; he looked older too, but much of the original beauty remained, for it was of a character that depended on form, not on mere youth or colouring. The fine, silken hair was thinner, but of the same deep jet; the eye seemed to burn with a brighter and intenser light; the curling lip was more haughty than ever. His figure, on the other hand, was slighter and less proudly erect, and there was in his whole air a something that spoke of weakness and failing health, which it pained me to witness.

It is strange how much we are often able to see and comprehend from a single glance. It was but for two or three seconds that I saw Devereux's face; scarcely a minute elapsed between his appearance on the hill and his putting Ravenswood into a brisk trot along the smooth road.

He had hardly done so when another horseman approached from the opposite direction, and the new-comer, wheeling round, brought himself close to Devereux. The latter checked his steed with a suddenness that threw Ravenswood on his haunches.

"What means this insolence, sir?" I heard Devereux exclaim.

"You would not admit me when I called, and I *must* speak to you," said Mr. Allan, for it was he.

"I will not be forced into any communication with you," replied Devereux, turning his horse's head.

Mr. Allan followed him.

"But it regards your wife—Lady Clara Devereux. You will sorely repent if you do not hear me."

"Sully not my wife's name by uttering it with your base, false lips. Man! you had better not provoke me!"

A sardonic smile broke over the mischief-maker's countenance.

"Were *that* the only blot on her name—" he commenced, then paused, meaningly.

Devereux darted a fierce look at him.

"Forgetting our previous quarrel, I came, as a friend, to warn you against a certain officer, whose name begins with an M."

"Viper, begone!" cried Devereux, in a voice that trembled with passion.

"Certainly," said the other, bowing ironically. "Since you will not listen, it is of no use talking. Besides, I see that you understand."

"I do *not* understand you!" said Devereux, while his heaving chest and deadly paleness belied the assertion.

"You are not aware, then, of the secret meetings at the farm-house, whither he goes disguised—"

"Farm-house—disguise!" said Devereux. "But I will make you convict yourself. Tell me—when—where—how long since?"

"It is three days since the last—the one I accidentally witnessed."

"Villain! Now I know that you lie!" cried Devereux. "For months my wife has never gone out alone."

"There is no such thing then as dodging a *chaperone*, on pretence of buying poultry, or visiting sick children? Well, I have no interest in proving these or other facts, of which there is abundance of testimony besides mine—I do not wish you to believe me—it is better for your peace of mind that you should not; although you must know it, sooner or later. My motives—"

"Your motives, I doubt not, are as vile as your calumnies."

"You are so polite and complimentary, sir, that I shall wish you good evening."

"Hold!" cried Devereux. "This has gone too far to be passed over. Contemptible as you are—"

"Nay, nay;" said Mr. Allan who was a thorough coward, "before you threaten—"

"Hear me!" thundered Devereux. "If you breathe one word—one syllable of what you have dared insult me by saying, I will—"

"You will what!"

"I will have you horse-whipped!"

"Do you know, sir," said his companion bristling up and affecting dignity, "that I might call you out for the offensive expressions you have used to me?"

"You might call me out certainly," said Devereux with withering scorn, "but I should treat your challenge with the same contempt that I treat your insinuations. Now, leave me."

"One instant—it is due to myself to—"

I lost the rest of the sentence, for the speakers had gradually moved on. I saw that they were some moments longer together. I perceived, and I felt that the traitor perceived, in spite of Devereux's indignant denial, that the venomed words had sunk deep into his heart. My predominant thought naturally was, could I undeceive him? Would my interference do any good, and how could I interfere? Should I confront them both, and contradict Mr. Allan's assertions? But those assertions were substantially true; it was only the inferences which were false. Yet those inferences unfortunately appeared so natural—

what had I to bring against them? Nothing but my own word—and would that have weight with Devereux? My heart swelled with proud indignation that this was a matter of doubt with one who, of all the world, should have known me best. The impulse to rush forward was instantly checked. It had been but a mere impulse. Without a long and minute explanation—which even with the advantage of patient attention, it would be difficult to make satisfactory—my interposition would appear little less than insane.

During the few seconds in which these thoughts passed through my mind, a sentence or two more had been exchanged by the speakers, and then Devereux, without returning Mr. Allan's salutation, gave the rein to his horse, which seemed almost as impatient as its master; gallopped back past the place where I stood, and was out of sight in an instant. Mr. Allan paused, smiled exultingly to himself, and then trotted away in an opposite direction; which was that leading to the farm.

Devereux, then, had not, as I half expected, gone to verify or refute the evidence. Was he in search of Melford? At first I trembled at the thought; then I augured possible good results from Devereux's emotion and appeal (if he would make one with delicacy and tact) to Melford's not ungenerous nature. But Devereux's judgment was sadly warped by his own passionate warmth of feeling, and it was far more probable he would use harsh and vehement language, and thus make matters still worse. I did not fear a duel—I believed that no amount of irritation or injury would induce Devereux to seek that mode of revenge. But Melford might be rendered yet more reckless and desperate.

And I—was I to remain passive and watch the working out of events; or could I in any way help to avert a crisis which like Lady Clara I felt to be approaching?

A sense of the utter impotence of human intellect and human agency weighed on my heart. I glanced round the lonely field—no one was near—I kneeled down and prayed aloud for Divine guidance, in a voice half choked with sobs and tears.

In a calmer and more hopeful state I regained the road and walked on almost mechanically till I reached another gate of the Thorne Hurst grounds, to which there was a lodge. A bright fire-light streamed out on the dusk, still road, and suggested thoughts of warmth and comfort in strong contrast with the chill dampness, and bleak wind without. I knew the woman who kept the lodge, so obeying a sudden impulse, I tapped at the door and entered. I was greeted with joyful exclamations by the mother and elder children, while the little ones looked up with a smile and then hung their heads shyly, excepting one bold little fellow who caught hold of my dress and asked for "cugar-plums." Cold, wearied, and exhausted with emotion, I was glad to sit down and rest on a low stool in the chimney corner, and to drink a cup of boiled milk with the children who were just going to supper.

Extraordinary as is the power of mind over matter; the influence of matter on mind—of our physical on our mental state, is perhaps stranger still. I had no reason to feel less miserable—affairs were just the same, I had thought of no way of rendering aid—and yet I felt more cheerful, merely from the effects of food, warmth and rest, and the sight of kind homely faces.

It struck me that I should do well to inform Lady Clara of what had passed; but how could I manage to see her? I did not like to write, as she had told me that Miss Doleby had, two or three times—by mere accident and owing to imperfect vision, as the old lady declared—opened letters (fortunately unimportant ones) addressed to her hostess. I thought the faithful Clifton might be able to conduct me to Lady Clara, and accordingly sent one of the children with a few lines requesting that domestic to come to me at the lodge.

I learned from the old servant that Lady Clara was very unwell and confined to her room; that Miss Doleby would not quit her; that Mr. Devereux had sent for a medical man, who said that his patient was in a highly nervous state, and must be kept perfectly quiet.

Such being the case, of course my communication was better not made at present; indeed, on reflection, I asked myself why should it be made at all? It might prepare her for the shock of Devereux's wrath, but what then? Forewarned—in spite of the old proverb—is not necessarily fore-armed. Again I thought if I could but disabuse Devereux. My testimony was surely of more value than that of Mr. Allan, which he believed; but then Mr. Allan's coincided with his suspicions and his fears. Yet, would he not rejoice to be set right?

Again, the question arose, could I set him right? I might try. It was worth the sacrifice of feeling. I would write a letter to him as soon as I got home. Clifton insisted on walking back with me, and lingered an hour in my room, talking over old times. Then the farmer begged my assistance in writing, or rather dictating, some important letters of business for him, before doing which it was necessary that I should master the details of the said business.

This, what with the good man's circumlocution and digressions, and the confusion which—although by no means devoid of intellgence—he made with he, they, it, and other personal pronouns, to the utter disregard of antecedent and relative, added to my having what is called a "poor head" for affairs involving money calculation, was not easily accomplished. Any one who has tried, knows how much harder it is to work out another person's ideas than simply to indite our own; and, as the farmer was constantly interpolating words quite foreign to the sense we wished to convey, and which he gave up reluctantly, because, as he said, "they were long'uns, and sounded well," it is not wonderful that we expended many sheets of paper, and a great deal of patience, before the task was finished.

It was near midnight, and I felt much more inclined to retire to rest than to undertake the painful task of writing to Devereux; but it must be done at once to have any chance of preventing ill consequences, and therefore I persuaded my kind nurse to make me some strong tea, which, together with bathing my face in cold water, had the effect of banishing drowsiness.

But the letter was not so quickly written. I wrote and tore up one copy after another—wasting more sheets of paper than the farmer had done. At length I struck out all lengthened explanations, and determined to send only the few following lines:—

"Having accidentally heard sufficient of what passed this evening between yourself and another individual, to be aware that he was putting in practice a design to render you miserable; I cannot refrain from giving you an assurance—for the truth of which I solemnly pledge my word—that there is, as you nobly declared, no truth in his vile insinuations against one of the best and most honorable of women. The meeting on which he lays such stress, caused her equal surprise and sorrow. I am, and have been for some months, staying at Oatlands farm, which accounts for my being correctly informed on this subject.

"It is not without extreme reluctance that I write; nothing but a strong sense that it is wrong not to make some attempt to remove an erroneous impression, likely to affect the happiness and peace of at least two human beings, would have induced me to do so. You may possibly disbelieve me—that, of course, I cannot help—I have done what appeared my duty, and satisfied, in this respect, my own conscience.

"I remain, as ever,

"Your sincere friend,

"E. L."

I had purposely written in a somewhat ambiguous style, in case the letter should fall into wrong hands; and having placed it in a conspicuous place, ready for my nurse, who had promised to send it to Thorne Hurst by eight o'clock in the morning, I found, to my surprise, that it wanted but three hours of that time. I sought repose, but was too fevered with excitement to sleep, and was still turning restlessly from side to side when my nurse entered, and announced that Clifton was in the kitchen, too much out of breath with running, to say more than that she wished to see me instantly.

BOOK X.

CHAPTER I.

FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

"Ask her to come up, nurse."

I had scarcely spoken before Clifton was by my bed-side.

"I am an early visitor," she commenced, "but there was no time for ceremony."

"What is the matter, Clifton? Pray, speak."

"Why, Miss Evelyn, you see, that soon after I got home last night, there came a letter for Lady Clara, which, if I don't mistake, was from the Captain, being folded and sealed in his hasty, careless way. I mention this because it may have helped to unsettle her mind, like."

"Unsettle her mind!" I gasped. "For mercy's sake, speak more plainly."

"Well, this morning, as she was so unwell, I did not go to her as usual at half-past seven, but waited till I heard the bell; but when it got near nine o'clock, and she didn't ring, I grew fidgetty. So I went up, and you may guess how frightened I was when I saw her no where."

"And has she left the house?" I cried, starting up.

"That she has, Miss; and has been gone some hours, too, for the under-housemaid, who was up at six, says she found the front door unbarred."

"And does every one—does your master know it?"

"No one; for I told Betsy the door must have been left unfastened through her own carelessness, and that my lady was very poorly, and wanted an hour or two more sleep. Miss Doleby never stirs till past ten, and Mr. Devereux, though he's generally up and stirring pretty early, does not leave his dressing-room till about the same time. So I just kept my own counsel, and came off to tell you; for I know," continued Clifton, wiping her eyes, "that you are her true friend, and I don't know, besides, for certain, who is, and who isn't, poor dear lady."

"Did Mr. Devereux speak to Lady Clara after he came home last night?"

"No; he went straight up to the room he has occupied since she was ill. The footman, who saw him, said he looked very pale and hagged-like. And now, Miss, what's to be done?"

"Yes, what's to be done, indeed! If you will go down for a few minutes, I will dress as quickly as I can. Stay, have you no clue whatever to her movements!"

Clifton shook her head mournfully.

"Yes—let me see—she asked me yesterday which was the earliest train to London. I thought she was wandering in her mind."

"What did you tell her?"

"That there was one a quarter after six. But that won't help us much, I doubt."

"Yes, it will—it may. Send my nurse up in five minutes, Clifton. Go and get some breakfast—or stay, I have no right to take you with me. When is the next train? Go and make out from the farmer's railway bill, and ask him to lend me ten pounds."

I believe poor Clifton half feared from these rapid orders and my agitated manner that I was also becoming unsettled in mind.

My nurse was thrown into what she called "a fluster" by the suddenness of our expedition, but she did not for an instant demur about accompanying me, although it was the great bacon-curing day at the farm.

"Just let me slip on my Sunday gown and bonnet, dear, that I may look respectable for your maid. My brother's harnessing Peggy; and Jane will cut some sandwiches; and here's your silk dress, and your velvet cloak; there's a cold east wind in spite of the sun; and those trains—"

"Dear nurse, don't stay to talk," I interposed. "Every moment is of consequence, and, for mercy's sake, do not stay for sandwiches. I don't want to eat."

"Bless my soul! and you have had no breakfast!"

"I will go and take some. Now, get ready."

In less than ten minutes my nurse and I were seated in the farmer's chaise-cart, with his little boy between us to drive it back.

The farmer informed me I must drive "sharp," as there were only five and twenty minutes to accomplish the five miles in.. As I was a good whip he thought I might manage it.

Peggy trotted briskly along; but owing to my impatience the distance seemed doubled. Only twenty minutes gone; and here we are at the town of M——. I stopped at the "Oak," which was in our way, and enquired for Captain Melford.

"Left at five o'clock this morning," was the answer.

We drove on again. Hush, what is that? The train—the train! we shall be too late. And two or three immense coal waggons are blocking up the bridge we have to pass. There is just room—no there is not—we'll try for it. A close shave! Our wheels grate against the bridge on one side, and against the foremost coal waggon on the other. The horses of the next are unruly. We shall be crushed. My nurse covers her face, the boy screams aloud. A touch of the whip, and Peggy springs forward.

We are clear, thank God; but that is the railway whistle. The train has stopped. We have yet five or six hundred yards to go.

Peggy enters into the spirit of the thing, and almost flies. I dart out, and up the steps, leaving nurse, (who will stay to kiss little Johnnie,) to follow. A first and second class ticket. The bell is ringing; the train is very full. Nurse scrambles into a carriage, which looks filled to suffocation with soldiers, and women, and bundles, and babies.

"Full—full—full," is the reply returned to the guard's enquiry for a place.

"We can make room here for the young lady," said a mild-looking lady-like woman, putting her head out of a window.

"I fear I shall inconvenience you," I said, when I had entered, observing that she had transferred a small child to a lady who seemed to be her sister, and taken a boy of six years old on her lap.

"Not at all," she answered, pleasantly.

I glanced round to take a survey of my travelling companions. Beside those I have mentioned, there were two nurses and two babies, belonging to the same party, a gentleman entirely concealed from vulgar gaze by an outspread sheet of the "Times," a fat, elderly lady, with an immense *bouquet*, and a young man in a travelling cap, of whom, as he was leaning back in the farthest corner of the same seat of the carriage on which I sat, with the two nurses and babies—the latter very fidgetty and requiring incessant dancing—between us —I had only a glimpse.

There was now leisure for reflection, and I began to fear that I had set out on a very random expedition. The more I thought, the more my hopes, and the ardour with which I had started, became chilled.

We had proceeded many miles, the babies had subsided into sleep, the little boy had transferred himself from his mamma's lap to mine, and was quietly drawing on the back of a letter, with a pencil I had given him; the old lady was eating biscuits, the elderly gentleman was still immersed in the "Times," and the young man still reading in his corner.

As we stopped at a rather important station, there was a general rousing and looking about. I tried to catch sight of the young man's face, and wondered why I wished to see him. Presently the hero of the "Times," lowered his paper for a moment, and asked his opposite neighbour a question. The object of my curiosity leaned forward in a polite and gentlemanly manner, so as to display his profile, and with a strange thrill of mingled pain and pleasure, I recognized Courteney! I observed him for some minutes, very attentively, and was much struck with the different way in which time had affected him and Devereux. Courteney looked better than ever, his handsome features, shaded by the rich brown hair that clustered beneath his cap, had a calm and unhackneyed freshness of expression, which combined with his clear but not pale complexion, made him look some years younger than he really was. Physical and intellectual vigour seemed united in him in the most just and graceful proportions, while in his look, dress, and bearing, every thing bespoke the thorough-bred gentleman.

And this man had loved me! I felt proud and honoured at the thought. We had not met or had any intercourse since the day when we walked on the sands at Dover, and I felt reluctant to make myself known, and yet could I bear not to do so? I would wait—but then he might quit the railway, perhaps very soon. Accident, however, favoured me. My nurse, when we stopped at the next station, came to the window by which Courteney sat.

"Bless me, Mr. Courteney!" I heard the good soul exclaim, "who would have thought to see you here, sir!"

"Mrs. Woodford!" said Courteney, frankly extending his hand. "How are you, and your family—I mean—"

"La, sir, haven't you seen Miss Evelyn? She's in this very carriage, sir."

Courteney looked hastily down the vista of babies and bouquets.

I bent forward. A smile of recognition was all that could be exchanged.

The man with the "Times," however, who, it seems, had complained of want of light at that side of the carriage, was invited, by Courteney, to change places with me; which arrangement being effected, Courteney and I were face to face.

I was, for the first time in our lives, the most embarrassed of the two. Courteney seemed to have forgotten every thing, but delight at meeting again, and an earnest wish to be of service. In a few minutes he had drawn from me the object of my journey, for I knew that I might place implicit confidence in him; and to consult some one of quick perceptions and sound judgment, and who, besides, knew all the parties concerned, was an inexpressible relief.

"And what do you propose to do when you reach London?" was Courteney's first question.

"That is what I have just been asking myself," I replied, in confusion. "You must think me very foolish."

"No, I admire your courage and spirit. Most people would have despaired."

"I never despair. Perhaps it would be smetimes better if I did."

"I think not. In this case the worst will be that you have your journey for nothing."

"True—but Oh! cannot I, cannot we do any thing?"

"At all events we will try," said Courteney, kindly and cheerfully. "The first thing, of course, is to find them."

"Oh, that is all I want! If I could only see and speak to her!"

"You think she is really gone to London?"

"I do."

"Have you any clue as to what part?"

"Only this. Mr. Melford's idea was, I know, to go to the continent, and therefore—"

"You would search the region of wharfs and foreign steamers?"

"Yes. They would most probably take a hired carriage, and I thought that I might, at the terminus, learn the different addresses at which the passengers, by that train, were set down. It being an early one, perhaps there might not be many."

I saw Courteney, as I spoke, struggling with a smile, and that smile was to my oppressed spirit what the last straw is to the back of the overloaded camel. At least I suppose it was so; for despite all efforts, my firmness broke down, and turning from him, I burst into tears. Courteney's hurried expressions of kindness and sorrow, soon made me regret my folly.

"Are you not sure of my sympathy on all occasions?" he asked, in a low earnest voice.

"Yes—yes—you are always most kind; but I do not deserve ——"

"Yes—you deserve—everything!"

This speech was so comical, and at the same time so kindly meant, that I brightened up at once, and could not forbear laughing. We reverted to the subject of the pursuit. Courteney made various suggestions, and I observed that he always spoke in the plural, and said what "we" must do, or what "we" had better think of.

"But your affairs?" I asked.

"Will wait quite well till to-morrow, or longer. This chase is two persons work, and if you will allow me to assist you, you shall find me very unobtrusive—I will take care, of course, not to appear in the business."

Courteney further said that in case our search proved unsuccessful, there was an old lady, a distant relative of his, under whose care he would place me.

"She is a kind hospitable old soul," he added, "and expects me to-day. She has heard much of you, and will be flattered to receive you as her guest, till it suits your plans that I should escort you back."

What could I do but thank him for his kindness, with tears in my eyes? I told him, however, that it was probable I should remain with Lady Clara that evening, or persuade her, if I could, to return with me at once.

"You do not look very fit for roving about London," said my companion, kindly; and, indeed, I was becoming so faint and exhausted as to be scarcely able to speak. The old lady lent me a smelling-bottle; and I was able to assure Courteney that it was nothing but the effect of some bad nights, and forgetting to breakfast that morning.

"We must be close to the — station," said

Courteney. "I will get you some refreshment."

I tried to prevent him; but insisting that he was very hungry also, he quitted the carriage, and came back with a supply of wine and water, biscuits and sandwiches.

I was just planning how to supply my nurse with some provisions, when she appeared with a bag containing bread, meat, and cheese, sufficient for three day labourers.

"My young lady was not for bringing any," she said, to Courteney; "but you won't despise them, I hope, sir. They're better than what you can buy."

"Indeed I will not," he replied; and gratified the good soul by accepting and consuming no inconsiderable portion of her store.

Courteney seemed pleased to see me much refreshed, and we again discussed our plans. Presently I ceased to hear his voice, my ideas became confused, and others totally irrelevant rose up and were entangled with them. Then I had a sort of dreamy perception that some one laid me down on the long seat, and placed a cloak under my head, after which I remember nothing more till I awoke from a refreshing ing sleep, wondering what had happened.

Courteney's kind face and voice soon brought back recollection. The family of children were gone; and two or three other passengers had taken their place. I perceived that we were near London.

"How kind of you to take so much care of me!" I could not help exclaiming, as I observed that Courteney had drawn down the blind to keep the sun from my eyes, and spread his own wrapper over me.

"You want taking care of, Evelyn," he replied, gravely. "I do not think you are near so strong as you were; you are thinner, and you have a cough."

"That does not hurt me," I answered; "I have had it all the winter. I assure you I never was better in my life."

"You are burning out your lamp of life too fast," said Courteney.

"What is the use of being young and strong," I asked, "if one is not able to work hard? Would you have me wait till I am old, before——"

"You will not live to be old, if you are not more careful. Be warned in time."

"I do not expect to live to be old, therefore I wish to make the most of life."

"Beware lest you defeat your own ends," said Courteney, earnestly. "If you over-work a young horse, it is worn out and useless before it reaches its prime."

He said more to the same effect. I attended little to his words then; I thought of them frequently some time afterwards.

CHAPTER II.

LONDON.

WHATEVER may be our situation or our feelings, it is impossible to enter the world's great metropolis, after an absence of some length, without experiencing sensations of a strange and peculiar character—sensations which nothing else can call forth. At least, such has always been my case.

"People talk about the poetry of the country," I observed, to Courteney; "but I believe that there is more of poetry and romance ,of mystery and interest in one of those dingy smoky streets, than in a thousand trees and meadows."

"Poetry and interest of a different sort," said Courteney, smiling. "Trees and meadows are very pleasant things in their way. You are rather *blazé* with them just now, perhaps. Yet I am no 'school-boy, Strephon,' to 'bleat of flocks and fields.' I agree with you in your feelings about the great city—

'Fed by all life, and fanned by every wind,
Where burns the quenchless poetry—*mankind!*'

But we were drawing near our journey's end, and not even the charm of Courteney's conversation, or his quotations from the greatest writer of the age, could long fix my attention.

Courteney procured a list of the localities where hired carriages had set down their passengers, by the early train. There were but fourteen.

"Brunswick Square, Tavistock Square, Great Russell Street, Regent Street," said Courteney, reading from his list. "But, Evelyn, unfortunately we not only get no numbers, but another deficiency of detail. Brunswick Square may mean any Street leading out of Brunswick Square. Regent Street—supposing that it really means Regent Street—what a wide range!"

"True; but I know they would not go to Regent Street or to any of the places you have read, or to any streets leading out of them. At least I have no reason to suppose so. Be so kind as to read on."

"'Euston Square, Vauxhall Bridge, Oxford Street, Queen Anne Street——"

"Stay—Melford has a friend in Queen Anne Street—I used to direct letters there for him when he was ill—I will make a note of that."

Among the other names there were three more that I wrote down. One was a street leading out of St. James's Square, in which Melford usually had apartments—another a street in Camden Town, where an old servant of Lady Clara's resided, and the third an hotel close to London bridge. It was decided that Courteney should go to Melford's lodgings and to Queen Anne Street, while my nurse and I went to Camden Town and the city; and that we should meet, or at all events, that I should leave a note for Courteney, at the hotel before-mentioned.

Having learned from the *Times* of that day that no continental steamers sailed before six o'clock, I went first to the old servant's. Courteney had provided me with a carriage and pair of horses from some livery stables, of which he knew the keeper, that I might be sure of speed and civility, and we drove along rapidly. I did not know the number, and was not quite certain as to the street, so that some time was spent in making enquiries before I found out where Mrs. Brown lived; and when I did, she was not at home.

From a green-grocer's wife, whose shop occupied the ground floor, I learned that a carriage, containing a gentleman and lady, had been at the house that morning at a time which corresponded, that her servant had spoken to them, that they wanted Mrs. Brown, and were disappointed not to see her. On the servant girl being summoned, my nurse further elicited that the lady was very pretty, and looked as if she had been crying. Moreover the driver was ordered to go to a street close by the Foundling Hospital.

This seemed promising; and we went to the street referred to; wondering what could be the object of the fugitives in selecting that locality, unless to take lodgings for a time in an obscure district. It was a short street, and I sought out those houses where apartments were let. A smartly-dressed, and moderately lady-like woman came to the door of one house just as I had knocked. She said she was the mistress; and obligingly asked if she could be of use. I told her I wished to find a lady who had called that morning with a gentleman in — Street, Camden Town.

"La!" she replied, smiling, "that was me and my son William. William's lame, and likes a drive, and I wanted to enquire about a 'ousemaid."

"But this lady had—had been crying."

"Well, I may have looked a little like it—I'd been so worrited. Servants is such plagues now-a-days."

Wishing her good morning, I turned away disappointed, and bid the coachman drive to the hotel near London Bridge.

"This comes, my dear nurse, of your asking such leading questions. Be more discreet in future."

She promised that she would, but neither leading or other questions seemed likely to avail us at the crowded hotel.

To my enquiry, whether there were among the visitors a lady and gentleman intending to leave that day for the Continent, the hurrying waiters replied civilly that they did not know; they thought it very likely; they would ask.

But they evidently forgot, or took no trouble about the matter.

In the hope of more attention, I asked the fat landlady at the bar if I could be accommodated with a room and some refreshment. She was very polite, but feared the house was quite full; they had been obliged to send away many people. I asked if she had referred these people to any other hotel. She mentioned one about half a mile off. Was the house full in the morning? She replied in the negative.

A waiter then announced that No. 23 was vacant; and the landlady, who appeared to take an interest in my mission, requested me to walk up, saying that she would try and help me.

"Will you take anything in the mean time, ma'am? Cold ham and chicken and a glass of ale?"

"Anything you please," I replied, accommodatingly.

We took possession of No. 23, after desiring our driver to refresh himself and his horses, as we might have to proceed further. I paced the room in a state of great perturbation, while my companion made a hasty meal. I presently rang, and asked if the landlady had any message for me. The landlady herself shortly appeared very much out of breath, and said she thought she had discovered my friends, a lady and gentleman from the country, who were about to start for Ostend, and who hearing that Miss Smith was enquiring for them, declared themselves ready to see her. My heart beat rapidly, but was quieted by a strong smell of brandy and water—and a jolly old gentleman, very like Punch's portraits of Mr. John Bull, rushed up, and was on the point of embracing me. He stopped on my drawing back, and his wife's exclamation of—

"Bless me, it ain't Matildar!"

I was also introduced to the presence of a newly-married couple, who seemed to think my intrusion very impertinent, and I began to be thoroughly wearied and discouraged. Fortunately, as I returned from the last unsuccessful errand, a waiter gave me Courteney's card, and the next moment my kind friend entered. He had met with no traces of those whom we sought, and now advised that we should go down to the steamer (there was but one sailed from those docks that night, and watch all who went on board.

"You say Ostend is the favourite starting-point of both our friends," observed Courteney;

" and by making enquiries, I find that no other boat leaves any London wharf for that sea-port until to-morrow."

It was a damp, chill evening; a dense fog rose up from the river, and a small drizzling rain fell. Porters, passengers, sailors, all jostled against each other; it was scarcely possible to see a yard off.

I clung to Courteney's arm, feeling giddy and bewildered. He was as kind and considerate as ever. I could not help asking myself reproachfully what I had ever done to deserve such kindness from him.

A few minutes, and we stood on the deck of the steamer. My nurse, who followed us—because, in case of our finding Lady Clara, it was decided that Courteney should not appear—went below, and reported that there were no signs of the fugitives. On the deck we saw them not, though we searched every part of it. Mr. Smith, my friend of brandy and water memory, having disposed of his wife and his luggage. approached with some civil observation or inquiry, which, I fear, I answered at random. I felt ill, and sick at heart. Courteney placed me on a seat, and stood beside me. A long, dreary half hour passed, and then a bell rang, and the words, " Now for the shore !"

sounded dull and hoarse through the heavy air.

"Stop a minute—make way there!" exclaimed one of the officials. "Here's more passengers!"

A slight confusion ensued. Several people were driven back from the narrow gangway to make room for the new-comers. A fat woman ran against me with considerable force. Courteney caught me as I reeled and was falling. I had scarcely recovered from this rude shock, when two more persons hurried past. I saw, or thought I saw a lady closely veiled, supported, or rather led, by her male companion. Recovering sudden strength, I darted forward. My hand was on her arm as she reached the cabin stairs.

"Clara!" I exclaimed, in a voice so agitated and unnatural, that I was myself startled at it.

She shuddered, screamed, and recoiled a few paces.

"Whait ails you, dearest?" softly asked the person by her side.

Her only answer was to cling to him trembling.

"Do you not know me?" I asked quickly. "It is I—it is your friend, Evelyn."

"Evelyn—Evelyn Lascelles! No, it is impossible!"

"Quite impossible," said Melford. "Let me take you to a place of shelter, out of this rain and darkness."

He would have hurried her on, but she had seized my hand, and in weeping accents implored me not to forsake her.

"Never!" I answered earnestly. "Is not my being here at this moment a proof that I will not?"

"Then you will share our exile?" said Melford. "You will go with us, and be her sister and mine?"

"Clara will return with me—will you not?" I asked, addressing her. "You are but come to see him on board—we are both come to see him start, and will go back together. Quick—or it will be too late!"

"Let us go below and converse," said Melford. "We shall be observed here."

"No—no, there is no time!" I exclaimed. "Come with me at once."

"She has pledged her word to leave England with me," said Melford, "she cannot retract."

"Would you wish to compel her—to take advantage of—"

"I wish to save her from wretchedness. Leave us, Miss Lascelles; this interference is ill-timed—unwarrantable."

"You are angry now," I said, "but you will thank me hereafter—thank me that I prevented you from ruining the reputation of one you profess to love—go—your affection is all selfishness!"

This hurried dialogue passed as we stood on one side of the companion stairs. I had told my nurse to be sure to seek me out at the last summons to go on shore. She now ran up, accompanied by a sailor, who said if we did not leave the boat immediately, we must be carried on to Ostend.

"You hear that!" I cried. "I cannot—must not go without you!"

"Then stay here, in Heaven's name!" said Melford, passionately. "Sailor, this lady is not going to land."

"Oh yes, I am—stay but one minute."

"Clara, come with me," said Melford, in a commanding voice, and drawing close to her as she stood weeping and trembling, one hand covering her face, the other grasping a rail for support. "Weak—vacillating that you are—have you no firmness, no strength of mind?"

"Oh, that I had!" she sobbed out—"then should I not have been here! But it is too late now—Evelyn—dearest—kindest friend, I have gone too far to recede—I must fulfil my fate—love me—love me still—I will never be unworthy of you—Farewell—let me embrace you once more—"

She threw her arms round me, and kissed me repeatedly. I disengaged myself and resolved to try one last appeal.

"If your child—if your Frederic could look down upon us now," I faltered, "and if angels can feel sorrow, would not his pure spirit grieve to see his mother—her whom he loved so fondly on earth—to see her—"

Sobs choked my voice, so that I could add no more—but I had said enough. With a piercing shriek she tore herself from Melford, and seizing my hand cried—

"No more—no more—thank God it is not too late. Let us go—let us go instantly!"

"Thank God, indeed," I exclaimed, and was about to lead her on, when the motion of the vessel caught my attention. I had been too agitated to observe it before. It must be a mistake. I looked round. The lights on the wharf were already at some distance—the wheels revolved quickly—we were indeed in motion. A triumphant laugh burst from Melford. A thrill of disappointment and alarm shot through my heart, at the danger I ran through this mischance, of losing my hardly earned victory. Checking the impulse to run and consult Courteney, I sent my nurse with a message to him, and remained with Lady Clara, who listened in silence, whilst Melford poured forth a torrent of reproaches, entreaties, and arguments. He concluded by lamenting that I had tracked them out; using, in his vehemence, many invectives more forcible than courteous. This roused Lady Clara.

"I will not have you speak against my best friend," she said, almost sternly. "She has been as true—far more true to me than you have."

"More true than I!" he exclaimed. "Heaven! Was there ever such injustice? But I will prove my truth more fully yet."

"Be true to yourself," I rejoined.

"Self! I think not of myself."

"I mean to your own conscience. Either this step you are urging Clara to take is right or it is wrong. If you declare upon your honour and your conscience that you think it right, I will say no more."

Melford shrugged his shoulders.

"I declare that I think it expedient," he replied.

"That is no answer. You can make none."

"See," exclaimed the young man, as we continued to glide down the dark river. "The fates are against you!"

"What do you mean by the fates?" I asked, gravely.

There was a moment's pause, and then coming up to me and taking my hand, he said—

"Now come, do not be troublesome, but be a dear little girl as you always are, when you do not take strange crotchets into your head. You did what you thought was right, but you have failed, and now you will stay quietly with us, at least for a few weeks, and be my guest and *her* chaperone."

"You may call principles crochets," I answered coldly, disengaging my hand, "and you may try to coax me into doing as you wish, but it is of no use. If I have failed, at least—"

"You have not failed!" cried Lady Clara. "I will go with you where you like. Henry, I was in a dream, a delusion, when I agreed to this—Heaven only knows with how many bitter pangs—but the dream is over now—the delusion is dispelled."

"And by what, Clara—I would ask you by what? Are circumstances altered? Do I love you less dearly?—or is your husband less tyrannical and cold hearted?"

"Tempt me no more," said Lady Clara, clinging to me.

"A boat is ready to take us on shore," said my nurse. "He has had a great deal of trouble to manage it."

"He! who do you mean by *he?*—you miserable old woman!" cried Melford, in a fury. "By Heaven! if any man has been assisting in this plot against me, I'll—I'll shoot him, I'll throw him overboard, I'll dash his brains out!"

"Oh, hush, for mercy's sake!" said Lady Clara.

"Be quiet!" he interrupted, with vehemence. "You must be against me, too, or how comes Evelyn here? You are both in collusion to make a dupe and a fool of me!"

We attempted to explain, but he would not hear us, and demanded of me imperatively who my nurse meant.

"You had better ask her," I replied, with an air of indifference, though my heart was throbbing almost audibly with dread lest Courteney should be involved in a quarrel.

Somewhat "taken aback," to use a nautical phrase, by my coolness, the fiery young man turned to my humble companion, and repeated his query.

"Bless you, sir!" the good soul answered simply, for she was very ready and quick witted; "a gentleman, sir, as was left behind like ourselves, and wants to go on shore, sir. He'll go shares with us, Miss, in paying for the boat."

Melford turned away, with a mocking laugh at his own impetuosity.

"You—you are not going on shore, are you?" he asked of Lady Clara, in a manner that betrayed tenderness, resentment, and wounded pride.

"Yes—yes!" she cried, with nervous eagerness.

"Then I will go with you."

"No," I interrupted, "I implore you not, for her sake. She has now the excuse of coming to witness your departure."

"My departure!" he cried, wildly. "Yes—I will indeed depart—and you will have no power to recall me. If you drive me away again it shall be for ever! Clara, unless you redeem your word solemnly pledged to me this morning, I will throw myself into the water, and you shall see me perish before your eyes.

With my dying breath I will cry that you—you are my murderer!"

Alarmed by his words and frantic gestures, Lady Clara, after a few gasping inarticulate attempts to speak, sank on her knees and grasped his hands.

"Captain Melford!" I exclaimed, "I knew that you had faults; but until now I at least thought you brave and generous—never until now could I have believed you cowardly!"

"I cowardly—*I!*" he said, standing still and breathing hard. "Dare you—dares any one apply that term to *me!* By heaven if you were a man, Evelyn ——"

"If I were a man," I replied, calmly. "I would say the same, and make you acknowledge the truth of my words, and apologize for your conduct A woman has no right to make her sex a shield, and utter hasty or insulting words, as though not more responsible than a child or an idiot."

"What—what mean you then?" said the young man, his former wildness returning. "Speak while I yet live to hear you!"

"I mean that as you have no more intention than I have of springing into the Thames and drowning yourself, it is cowardly—yes, I repeat it—*cowardly* to endeavour to act upon the feelings of others by the threat of suicide, which, if you are not too good a Christian, at least you are too brave a man too fulfi

Melford bowed his head.

"You are right. I ask pardon," he said, humbly and mournfully.

"And you are as generous and noble-minded as I always thought you," I said, in a faltering voice, and taking his hand.

"I—I may return with you," he pleaded.

I knew not how to refuse him, and yet—he saw my hesitation, and profited by it.

"I promise to leave you the instant you land," he urged.

"Well, upon that condition ——"

He waited for no more; but offering an arm to each of us, hastened to that part of the vessel which the boat had just reached. Courteney was already in the boat, and assisted Lady Clara, my nurse, and myself to descend.

"Keep back there a moment, sir," said a waterman to Melford, who was about to spring after us. "Keep back, and don't jump, or you'll upset the boat."

Courteney hastily seated us; but Lady Clara, either from nervousness or want of thought, started up again just as the impetuous Melford, disregarding the boatman's warning, sprang on to our frail skiff. It swayed frightfully on one side—a splash and a shriek were heard—Lady Clara had fallen into the water. Melford, with a fearful cry, plunged in after her. I knew he could not swim; I saw Courteney standing up, as in hurried words he implored me to keep quiet.

The life of a thousand years could not efface the agony of that moment. The confusion, the darkness, the hissing and roaring of the checked steam-engines, the piercing screams, the loud shouts of the sailors, the splashing and foaming water, the sickening apprehension. My first impulse was to spring overboard also, and, if I could not save Lady Clara, to share her fate, but Courteney's voice, and my nurse, who threw her arms round me, prevented my doing so.

Another splash; Courteney was also in the water, and, like those he sought to save, vanished in the mist. I could endure no more, and for the next five minutes was happily unconscious of every thing.

When I recovered my senses, some one dripping wet, and without either hat or coat, was supporting me, and a low voice said—

"They are safe!"

"And you have nobly saved them!" I exclaimed, grasping his hand.

"Hush!" he said softly. "I believe no one knows, me as yet, and I will preserve my incognito if I can. *She* need never know that any one but yourself was aware of the events of to-day. What are your plans?"

I replied that I had thought of going direct to the railroad, but that on account of the recent accident it would be advisable to return first to the hotel where I had met with civility, that Lady Clara might change her wet clothes. He said that we could have nearly two hour's rest, yet still be in good time for the mail train; and he approved highly of our starting that night.

These few hurried sentences being exchanged, I crept near to Lady Clara who lay at the bottom of the boat moaning and still half senseless. I raised her head, and took off my cloak to keep the chill air from her, trying meanwhile to soothe poor Melford, whose anxiety and self-reproach were great. I heard him presently thanking Courteney, and courteously enquiring to whom he was so deeply indebted.

"I did no more than any man would have done in my place," said Courteney simply.

"I am a good swimmer, therefore a plunge is nothing to me. It was you who showed the pluck."

Melford seemed about to repeat his question, but as Courteney had drawn back with folded arms and hat pressed over his brows, as if disinclined for conversation, the young officer said no more. I was afraid lest he should recognize Courteney's voice, but remembered that the two men had met very few times, and then only in general society.

When we landed Lady Clara was so weak and exhausted that both Melford and Courteney were obliged to support her to a carriage. She turned however to thank the latter with her usual sweet manner. Courteney replied by a low bow, and declining Melford's invitation to accompany us by a gesture rather than in words, walked off at a rapid pace. He had found time, as we were landing, to tell me in answer to a whispered question, that he should proceed on foot to his relative's, whose address he mentioned; and also to beg I would write soon. I could not repress a sigh as he left us; I wondered when, or if ever, we should meet again. It seemed so extraordinary to part from him as from a stranger; without a shake of the hand or even a kind look, for it was much too dark to distinguish faces.

But my thoughts were soon recalled to my two companions. I felt as if my purpose was only half executed while Melford remained. After what had occurred I could not forbid him to go with us to the hotel, but I determined that we should part there.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

On reaching the hotel, I went to assist Lady Clara in changing her wet clothes, for she still seemed nearly stupified. When I had removed some portion of her dress, and was endeavouring to dry the masses of hair which were soaked with water, she was seized with violent shivering. Alarmed by this, and by the extreme paleness of her face, I got her without loss of time into a warm bed, and persuaded her to drink some hot gruel.

At the end of an hour during which I watched by her, the chilliness was increased, while her face and hands had begun to burn, and she complained of thirst and intense headache. I became very anxious, and after waiting another quarter of an hour, during which she grew worse, I sent for a physician in the city; whom I happened to know by name as clever in his profession. I did not like, under the circumstances, to send for our friend the celebrated Dr. E——, nor yet to Dr. W—— to whom we were personally known.

Dr. S—— was fortunately at home, and came at once. He was a man of very few words and abrupt manners. He muttered something about a "shock to the system," wrote a prescription, and said he would call in the morning.

"Will she be better soon?" I asked.

"What do you mean by soon?"

"We are anxious to leave London tonight."

"Impossible."

"Is she too ill? will she be well enough by to-morrow."

"I will tell you when to-morrow comes." Then observing that I looked perplexed and uneasy he added; "Your friend is going to have an attack of fever, and you will probably have inflammation of the lungs if you remain in those wet clothes. You must have been in the river, too."

I was certainly nearly as wet as if I had, so I thanked the doctor for his caution; he bade me good evening and departed.

Before I had got my clothes dried, Melford who had somehow made out that Lady Clara was ill, sent to beg I would speak to him. Before complying I went to Lady Clara and proposed that as she was unwell and unable to return to Thorne Hurst, we should send to Devereux.

"Send to him!" she said with nervous agitation. "What for?"

"Either to explain by letter what has occurred, or—or to request him to come here in person."

"Augustus come here! Augustus come to me! when I am ill too—Evelyn, I think I am very ill!" she exclaimed, her eyes sparkling with fever and excitement.

"Not unless you like," I replied, soothingly; "but we will write to him, shall we not?"

"There is no such haste," said the invalid. "Perhaps if I can get to sleep I may return to-morrow morning, or, at latest, in the afternoon."

She began to weep passionately. I soothed her, and then, much as it grieved me to urge the point further, I said—

"A few lines only, or a message. Think of the distress of mind—the agony that your husband is enduring."

"Yes," she answered, quickly; "and on what account? Not love and care for me, but love and care for himself—his name—that I should ever have borne it!—his honour—what is his honour?"

She looked so wild and excited that, of course, I would not argue any more with her; but kissing her hot cheek, begged her to compose herself and try to sleep.

Melford declared that he was in a distracted state of mind, and that he wished he had been drowned.

I endeavoured to convince him of the wickedness and impiety of such a wish, but produced little impression. He wanted to go and see Lady Clara, and satisfy himself as to her state, but this I would not allow.

The invalid had insisted that I should not sit up with her. I therefore retired to my room, leaving her in charge of my nurse. But though I slept, it was that troubled sleep which exhausts more than wakefulness, and when I roused up, a weight seemed to be on my heart.

Lady Clara had passed a very bad night. Dr. S—— came early, and again in the middle of the day. After his second visit, Lady Clara expressed much alarm about her own state. She had never before in her life had a serious illness, and she now told me, with tears, that she feared she should die, and that she wished Devereux to be sent for without loss of time. With much difficulty, she wrote a few scarcely legible lines, assuring him, that though appearances were against her, she was innocent, that she felt she was dying, and prayed him to come to her immediately.

I watched with her the greater part of that night, during which she was occasionally delirious, and talked of Arundel and her child. The next day the fever was still unsubdued, and she kept constantly calculating the time when Devereux ought to arrive, and as hour after hour passed, and still he came not, she grew more and more anxious.

A third weary night, and another day passed, and as it drew towards its close, I observed a decided change in the invalid. She grew cooler and calmer, the flush left her cheeks, which were now deadly pale, and all traces of delirium seemed to have vanished. Not knowing if this betokened good or ill, I wished to send for Dr. S——, who had not seen his patient for some hours, but Lady Clara begged me not, saying that he could do nothing more for her; and then feebly added, that she felt she should never recover, but that she hoped to live long enough to see her husband.

It was about nine o'clock, and I was watching by Lady Clara in the large sombre apartment, to which I had tried with but indifferent success to give an air of comfort and home, when a chambermaid came to the door, and announced that the gentleman we expected had arrived.

A step—*his* step sounded on the stairs, and I had scarcely time to retreat into the next chamber before he reached the landing. Mechanically I wandered into the sitting-room, where I was almost immediately joined by Melford.

"He is come," said the young man; "but you know it—I can tell by your quivering lips—by your varying colour. Evelyn, it is in vain to deny the fact, you love that man still—and yet—and yet you dare to be severe on me!"

"If I love him still, it is with such love as is consistent with his honour and mine. If I am agitated it is by the past."

"Yes, you are better than I am," he said, taking my hand with frank kindness, and a changed manner.

"But that ought not to be," I replied, earnestly; "for my case is surely the most trying. I was for months engaged to Mr. Devereux—I had learned to connect his image with all my future life."

"But you are a woman; and somehow women bear these sort of trials better than we do."

"Why?"

"Because it is their nature, I suppose."

"Their nature?"

"Well, then, they have more religion and patience, and calmer temperaments."

"I doubt the last. Women are usually more excitable than men; they have weaker frames, and hearts at least as tender. I often wonder that men, who are so proud of their mental and physical strength, should so readily and unblushingly admit the superiority of their feebler sisters in one of the noblest qualities mortals can possess—the power to endure!"

"I might bid you remember the old fable of the 'Oak and the Willow,'" said Melford. "We cannot bend—we break."

"The simile does not apply. To take higher ground.—Are you not, as responsible and immortal beings, ashamed to own that you are less moral and religious, that you have less power to resist temptation than those you consider to be, intellectually, scarcely your equals?"

"I own this, because it is a fact, and I am candid."

"That is just what I find fault with. You pique yourself on your candour, and acknowledge, with a sort of pride, what ought to cause you the deepest humiliation."

We were here interrupted by my nurse, who came to say that Lady Clara begged to see me instantly.

I replied that I would come in a few moments.

"Evelyn," said Melford, kindly, and again taking my hand, "believe me, I feel sincere regard, admiration, and pity for you, although you are hard upon me sometimes."

"Heaven knows I would not be hard upon

you," I answered, returning the friendly pressure of his hand.

"You will come back then and tell me what passes—and—and should all hope be really over—I may see her once more! Promise!"

"Yes—yes, I promise—now let me go."

CHAPTER IV.

WE MEET AGAIN.

Making a desperate effort, and not allowing myself to pause and think, I reached the door of Lady Clara's room. It was half open, and I entered. The light fell full upon the invalid's face. She looked calm and happy. Beside her sat her husband, who rose as I came in, and moved a few steps towards me. And thus, by the bed-side of his dying wife, Devereux and I met once more.

Seeing that he perceived me, I stood still, trembling and silent, my heart throbbing with suffocating violence. He approached, took my hand, and pressed it to his lips, with a mixture of tenderness and respect, by which I was no less surprised than touched.

"Then you forgive me," I farltered.

"Forgive you!" he exclaimed, with deep emotion. "It is for me to be forgiven. Oh, Evelyn, you have indeed taken a noble revenge! I know all—I know that but for you—"

He paused, but he had said enough. At that moment I felt as if all the trials and sufferings of my past life were more than compensated for. It was but for an instant that I indulged this feeling, for in acute sympathy with Lady Clara, I naturally forgot myself.

"Evelyn," said my sick friend, faintly but with earnestness, "he did not get my letter till—he hastened to me as soon as—"

"I was sure of it!" I interrupted.

Devereux looked at me gratefully.

"And am I then," he said, "so kindly judged by you to whom I was so unjust? Yes—though in different ways, I have grievously wronged you both—I feel and acknowledge it now—pride is over with me."

He sank on to a seat, and bowed his face on his hands. Unspeakably affected, I was meditating how to console him, when a low moan drew my attention to Lady Clara. She seemed to be fainting, but partially revived when I applied remedies.

"This excitement has been too much for her," I whispered to Devereux.

"Oh Heaven, she is dying!" he cried, starting up. "Have I not sinned enough against her that I must also cause her death?"

"No—hush—do not speak thus—she will be better soon."

But she seemed, on the contrary, to grow worse, breathing hard, and moaning incessantly.

Devereux, who, like some men, was unable to bear the sight of extreme illness, retired to the remotest part of the room, pale as death, and utterly unnerved.

Just then, to our great relief, Dr. S—— was announced.

The physician told us that the fever had returned, and that his patient's life was in great danger.

Devereux was much distressed.

"That dreadful morning when I learned her flight," he said, after I had conducted him to the sitting-room, and, at his entreaty, seated myself for a few minutes, near him—"On that dreadful morning I first felt how harsh and cruel my conduct had been; I felt that I deserved the misfortune which overwhelmed me. I did not—I could not exculpate her—but I felt that had her conduct been twice as blameable, I had no right to exercise such tyranny over any human being—that such violent measures were likely to accelerate, or even cause the event I dreaded."

"There has existed an unfortunate misunderstanding between you," I said, emboldened by the frankness with which he spoke to me; "but I trust—"

"A misunderstanding," he repeated, fixing his eyes on my face. "Yes; she has just declared that at the time of our marriage, and long after, she loved me—really loved me."

"I can bear witness to that!" was my hasty but earnest exclamation.

Again he looked at me.

"You colour, you are silent. Tell me how you came to be her friend—to save her. Do not fear to tell me all."

I could scarcely believe my senses. Such words from him! It must be that Lady Clara had, in their short conference, impressed him with my truth, and my faithful attachment to her—to them both—her words must have possessed a force and a weight such as belongs only to the words of those who are trembling on the verge of eternity.

And I told him all; how his wife and I had met accidentally—how she had implored me to be her friend—how I had at first refused—my reluctance—my scruples—I dwelt on her goodness of heart, her purity and innocence. He seemed astonished at my enthusiasm.

"If you really knew her character," I replied, "you would feel as I do."

Devereux sighed deeply, and remained a long time silent and absorbed in gloomy thoughts.

"May I not hope that what I have been able to tell you, will make you happier—will set your mind more at ease for the future?" I at last said, timidly.

"Happier!" he exclaimed, with a calm that was more touching than violent grief, for it seemed the tranquillity of despair. "No—I threw away my only chance of happiness when I allowed a contemptible prejudice—a paltry feeling of jealousy and anger to estrange my heart from you—from the only being who had power to influence me for good! Since then my evil genius has reigned triumphant. Yes, Evelyn," he added, with great though suppressed emotion, "beloved as you were in the bright days of our courtship, you were not half so dear as since—since I entered on the most wretched and the most hopeless of all states—wedded life without love. I have indeed been awfully punished—but I deserved all for my faults towards you—even that heaviest blow, the death of my son—my only child, whom I idolized rather than loved! The recollection unmans me yet."

He paused abruptly, and dashed the tears from his eyes; then starting up, walked across the room.

"Evelyn," he said, "how you must despise and hate me."

"Do I appear as if I did?" I asked, greatly moved. "Was it not even more for your sake than hers that—that I—"

Unable to proceed, I paused and covered my face with my hands.

"How little," said Devereux after a short silence, "do we men know of the depth and strength and purity of a woman's love! oh that I should have thrown away yours, Evelyn!"

"It is useless to recur to the past," I said, struggling to be calm.

"One word more. Since you know my past

history it is due to myself to say that in marrying Her, I was not influenced by love. Though perhaps I judged wrong, my motives—"

"Were good—noble—self-sacrificing!" I exclaimed, as he hesitated. "I felt and understood them at once."

He looked at me with gratitude and surprise.

"How much more justly have you judged my character," he said, "than I ever did yours!"

"Because I understood you;" I answered quietly. "You never thoroughly understood me."

Devereux looked at me intently.

"Perhaps you are right. Evelyn you are my superior in every way. I was jealous of you—I thought—"

"No—no," I cried, "do not say that—it is all untrue—I did wrong in concealing from you so long that I belonged to a class which you hated—which you had reason to hate."

"Alas!" exclaimed Devereux with an agonized look; "why do I understand and appreciate you now that it is of no use?"

"Do not say of no use," I rejoined. "That we have at last met, and that this explanation has taken place, will I trust make the future lives of both happier."

"Future!" said Devereux, his countenance changing, "Oh I dare not think of the future—the past is fraught with remorse! Why withdraw me so quickly from the present?"

"Because it is of more consequence that you should think of the future," I answered gravely.

He regarded me wistfully and sorrowfully for a moment, and then his brow grew more and more clouded.

"My wife—Melford—" he gasped at length.

"Have I then spoken in vain?" I asked sadly.

"No; you have persuaded me of my wife's comparative innocence; and as long as I live it shall be my study—I will not say to make her happy, for that is beyond my power—but to remove from her every source of unhappiness. But Melford—what have you said—what can you say in his defence?"

I replied by mentioning various good traits in the young man's character; and pointing out many extenuating circumstances, especially that his conduct had been much influenced by the belief that Lady Clara was unhappy.

Devereux seemed softened, but said—

"Yet for all this he loves her. And what peace—what security can there be, whilst—"

He paused, and was long silent. I ventured to advise that he should speak to Melford, and at last he consented to do so.

"Do you know where he is?" asked Devereux. "You colour—It cannot be that he is in this house?"

With some difficulty, and by taking the blame to myself, I succeeded in disarming his anger, and at his request was the bearer of a polite message to the young officer.

I did not know the result of the interview until the next day, as Lady Clara required all my attention.

Melford told me in the morning that Devereux had addressed him courteously and kindly as his wife's kinsman; that he had expressed deep sorrow for his recent harsh conduct to Lady Clara, and added that they had now, he hoped, come to a better understanding.

"You meant well," continued Devereux, as the young man only replied by an inclination of the head. "You intended to act the part of a friendly kinsman, in withdrawing her from my roof; but the step was injudicious—you are too young and too good looking," he added, kindly, laying his hand on his companion's shoulder, "and the relationship is too distant, to afford security from the world's scandal. But I forgive you," he continued more gravely. "My own life has been too full of error for me to be hard on another."

Melford who was prepared for a stormy scene, and whose thoughts had been runing on a duel, told me that he was melted at once by this mildness and generosity, He stammered out his sorrow and repentance, and such was the extraordinary fascination which Devereux could exercise over those whom he desired to influence, that Melford experienced a sudden and complete change of sentiments towards one whom (though they could scarcely be said to have met before) he had long despised and detested.

Devereux proceeded to say that he trusted his young kinsman would see the expediency of not meeting again for some time. To this Melford assented, and offered to give any pledge with which he would be satisfied.

"I am perfectly satisfied with your word," said Devereux, with a frankness which completed his conquest over the young soldier.

"And I know," added Melford, when he repeated this part of the conversatson, "that it is to you, Evelyn, that I owe his favourable opinion of me." I said something about his right to demand satisfaction for my offence, and my willingness to be a mark for his vengeance. I was astonished at the agitation my words produced.

"'If you knew my history,' he said, solemnly, 'you would not wonder that the mere thought of a duel makes me tremble. May you never know what my feelings are by experience.'

"He then told me that he had, many years ago, killed one who he believed had deeply wronged him, in a duel. In a few brief words, which strong feeling rendered eloquent, he described the anguish and remorse by which his whole after life had been darkened. I wished that some of my hot-headed brother offcers had heard him! It is at least a warning which I trust never to forget!"

CHAPTER V.

EMIGRATION.

"I WILL go and fight the Caffres," said Melford, when, after another week of intense anxiety, Lady Clara was at last pronounced out of danger.

This interval, the young man had, of his own accord, passed at his old lodgings in Jermyn Street, St. James', from a delicacy of feeling which Devereux fully appreciated. I said, at his old lodgings, but, in truth, the greater part of the time must have been spent in the intervening streets, for he came twice or thrice a-day to our hotel, for intelligence of the invalid.

On these occasions, sometimes I saw him, sometimes Devereux, sometimes both. I was much pleased with Devereux's behaviour towards "his young kinsman," as he styled Melford. Without the smallest assumption of superiority, he made their difference of age an excuse for generous interest and kind advice, and treated Melford with a frank and friendly confidence, which, I believe, did more than any thing else towards making him ashamed of his wrong and foolish passion.

The anxiety too, that Melford had felt lest his cousin's life should be lost through his imprudence, had had a salutary effect; and joy that she was spared, helped to make him forget selfish feelings. He had repented and relapsed so often, that it was difficult to feel secure about him, especially as he was guided in matters of right and wrong by the changeful and shadowy phantom called Honour, rather than by the unerring precepts of Religious Truth; but there seemed, at present, to be more solid foundation for hope.

Honour was now enlisted on our side, and forbade falsehood or treachery to the generous and trusting husband; the cruel domestic tyrant—whose conduct, to one reasoning merely from this deceptive human code, might seem to warrant any measure that insured deliverance —this tyrant had vanished for ever.

It was with almost his former boyish spirits that the young officer, sitting at breakfast with Devereux and myself, proclaimed his hostile intentions against our African foes. Devereux looked up gravely, and said—

"Still full of that wild scheme, Henry?"

I began to laugh.

"What do you mean?" asked the soldier, disconcerted.

"Nothing, but that it strikes me as strange to mark your reconciliation with your friends, by going to destroy poor Caffres."

"*Poor* Caffres! As I told you yesterday—"

"Well, wicked Caffres if you like, though there has been so much cruelty and injustice in European conduct towards them from the beginning—"

"That is not to the purpose. The war exists, and must be carried to a termination."

"Which can be done without you."

"Of course," said Melford, testily. "The fighting world could do without my sword, as the reading world, I suppose, could do without your books."

"There, there children, don't quarrel!" said

Devereux, playfully. "Melford, Evelyn, has the best of it. She can improve the minds of her fellow creatures—"

"While I can only injure their bodies," said Melford, recovering his temper.

"And that at great personal risk."

"So much the better," replied the young man, with sudden gravity.

"Do you wish to cause us all grief?" asked Devereux.

"No, my generous friend, no!" said Melford, warmly, but—but what better fate do I deserve?"

"Why not spend the rest of your life in trying to deserve a better?" I asked. "I will tell you a much more sensible plan. I have often heard you wish you were a landed proprietor, only that the English way of farming is too prosaic for you. Now I learned today, by a letter, forwarded from home, that some old friends of ours are about to emigrate to the United States, would not the same sort of thing suit you?"

"I emigrate! I dig and delve, and feed sheep, and rear cattle! I turn settler! What a curious idea!

He laughed merrily.

"Is it more curious than being shot down by an ambuscade of Caffres?"

"It is less glorious at all events."

"I see no glory in being murdered by a set of brutal black savages."

"You mean the Chesters are going to the States?" asked Devereux.

"Yes. I have always kept up a correspondence with the youngest girl, ever since—"

"*That* winter when you were with us in the Highlands," said Devereux, gloomily.

"Yes, I am very fond of Kate Chester," I continued, quickly. "She has stayed with us at Heathfield."

"They are connexions of mine," said Devereux, recovering himself. "Chester is a good fellow, and would do any thing for me."

"There is something grand and deeply interesting to me," I observed, after a silence, "in the thought of that young New-World country, with its vigorous life, its iron strength, and wondrous scenery, striding on like an infant giant, to wrest the palm of moral and intellectual greatness from older competitors!"

"Young Chester should hear you," said Devereux. "He is just returned from America, and is enthusiastic."

"I should like to know more about the subject," said Melford, thoughtfully.

"Are you inclined to walk as far as Brunswick Square?" said Devereux. "The Chesters are in London, and I should like to see them before their departure."

Melford readily assented. The visit was made, and he returned delighted with the family, particularly with Frank, a portion of whose enthusiasm he had caught. Melford was engaged to return to dinner, and acquire more information. He became daily more intimate with his new friends, and as I had hoped, finished by deciding to cross the Atlantic in the same vessel, and accepted a cordial invitation to remain one of the party for a time.

The eldest daughter, the beauty, had married a silly, extravagant young man, merely on account of his handsome face, and the improvident young couple, with their three children, being too poor to have an abode of their own, lived at the paternal home. The son-in-law, a tall, strong fellow, six feet high, was anxious to emigrate, and to work, as he said, with his hands, which he never could do with his head.

Mr. Chester, a prudent and practical man, undertook to see that Melford's capital was turned to the best advantage, in case he chose to become a settler. Devereux made him promise that he would take half a year, at least, to look about, and study the *pros* and *cons*, before taking so decisive a step.

I spent one evening in Brunswick Square, and was delighted to see the good understanding that subsisted between Melford and his new brother and sister, as he termed Frank and Kate.

How strange, yet how fortunate it is, that we sometimes in life meet with one or two beings, who, unknown before, are, by some mysterious sympathy, converted at once into old friends—who seem associated, as it were, with the pleasure, but not the pain of the past—who occupy the present, and throw a sun-light over the future.

It is true, these sudden loves or friendships have not the depth and fervour of those begun in early youth, and burnt into our hearts, by the griefs, no less than the joys of years—the first seem like an episode—a dream—who among us does not remember when a brief period—months—perhaps only days of his life were brightened by some sweet face, soothed by some loving heart, or elevated by some noble spirit, which flashed up suddenly, like a meteor, out of darkness, and then as suddenly disappeared.

At least, my own life has been full of such episodes. As I write, a host of shadows rise and pass before me, like Banquo's ghostly kings.

See, there is one—a young Scotchman, with soft, fair hair, and a voice like music, whose extraordinary beauty and heavenly expression of countenance make him a fit model for one of those angels who once visited mortals—I knew him but three months, and before we met, disease had set its seal on him—yet in that brief time we had loved—though I loved him as a being not of this earth.

Then follows another, almost a boy in years, far less beautiful, but with a world of intellect in his too-bright eyes—to whom I had listened with wonder, as he poured forth words of deep wisdom, or led me into the mazes of abstruse science, which his young mind had grasped as easily as others seize the first rudiments of every-day learning. I see him, as a smile lighted up his pale, thoughtful face at having met with one, who, though ignorant on his favourite subjects, yet loved to learn, and who *understood* him! His soul wore out its frail tenement—I saw the thin fingers tremble as he wrote—I heard the hollow cough that interrupted the terse, eloquent language—the student fell a victim to his passion for knowledge.

There glides a graceful girl, springing just into woman, the loveliest and brightest of six fair sisters—she smiles upon us, and fades away, rather than dies. Now I gaze on a fairy child, almost an infant—a rustic pet that I had nursed and tended in vain, whose baby face would brighten as my step drew near, and whose dying eyes turned last on me, with a look I could never forget. Poor Charlie!

But all are not dead. That mild, pensive clergyman of middle age, with the head of an apostle, who used to counsel and reprove me with the kindness of a father and the patience of a saint—whose life was one continued act of devotion and love; his sweet young wife, who was to me as a sister; their little, spiritual-looking boy, who would steal from his companions or his toys to kneel by his little crib and offer up prayers for me—when I was in sickness and sorrow—prayers which must surely have been heard in heaven! These live, but in a distant land. There are others—some living, some not—but all are dead to me.

The figures pass, as passed the shadows they recall—leaving such a faint impression on our visible outward life, such deep-graven traces on the life within! How often, when apparently under the dominion of the actual, the real, are we in truth swayed by strange visionary thoughts of what might have been!

But enough of such dreams!

As I looked at Melford's new friends—the brother so spirited and hopeful, the sister so gentle and engaging, and both so good, sensible, and warm-hearted, I hoped that this friendship might be more than an episode—yet what, after all, is happiness, but a brief episode in life's dull drama.

CHAPTER VI.

FAREWELL.

Another week found Lady Clara quite convalescent, and Melford on the eve of departure.

As we were together round the fire-side, I could not help thinking how strange it was that we four should be thus assembled—four persons whose interests, hopes, opinions, and principles seemed as opposite as the Antipodes. Yet here we were, and really harmonious, not at all—as might have been expected beforehand—in a state of restraint and discomfort, resembling that of those most miserable beings, the so-called Happy Family. Melford had a standing joke with me about our being exact prototypes of the imprisoned dog, cat, bird and mouse—the latter animal being himself, because, as he said, we others had each the power to worry or destroy him—yet I believe we were all happy, though in different degrees. Melford, full of hope, and restored to self-esteem, perhaps the most so. He saw his cousin with recovered health and peace, and he had that without which a man cannot be really happy—an object in life.

Lady Clara, as she lay on her sofa, anxiously watched her husband's countenance; but when he spoke, or showed her some little kind attention, as he frequently did, a bright glow mounted to her face, that seemed to reflect the heart's happiness.

Much as I had been with her, I appeared this evening to see a new phase of her character developed—and never before had she looked to my eyes so surpassingly lovely. Her complexion, rendered yet more transparent by her late illness, was perfectly dazzling; a flush of excitement had driven the paleness from her cheeks, and lent fresh brilliancy to the large lustrous eyes; while the hair, which had a rich depthof colouring rarely seen in those of Saxon race, was drawn back in loose and clustering masses, showing the classic and perfect contour of the features, brow, and throat.

"He *must* love such a beautiful—such a faultless creature," I thought; and then, for a moment, I was tempted to envy her fate.

Alas! unless we constantly watch our hearts, how apt is some thought of evil to mingle with our best and purest emotions! It was but for a moment—for was not this, under the blessing of heaven, my own work—had not this reconciliation been my chief object for years—had I not prayed, and longed, and thought that I could die content were it but accomplished? And I did indeed rejoice from my very soul—and felt that if the sacrifice of my life at that moment could ensure that happiness lasting, the sacrifice would be gladly made.

Then I gazed at Devereux, and wondered if he were really happy; and was struck by his pale, worn face, and wasted form—which contrasted painfully with the youthful beauty and vigour of Melford—and thought of his frequent forebodings of premature death.

The parting that evening—for Melford was to set off early the next day—could hardly be called sorrowful.

Devereux made an excuse for being absent part of the evening, and said he should see the travellers at the railway in the morning.

I had invented some pretext for leaving the cousins a few minutes alone—being authorised by a look from Devereux—but a glance of Lady Clara's stopped me.

Melford's manner towards myself was pointedly cordial and friendly.

"Farewell my two sweet sisters," were his last words, as he pressed a hand of each. "You shall see yet that I am not wholly unworthy of your kind and affectionate interest."

CHAPTER VII.

SHADOWS.

I HAD not neglected to perform my promise of writing to Courteney; whose letters in return, kind and sensible, such as a brother might write to a sister, were cheering and soothing in my trying circumstances. He rejoiced sincerely at what had passed between Devereux and myself; for I had told him all, and he evinced great interest in all that related to Melford and Lady Clara.

Devereux seemed anxious to know all concerning Courteney and myself, and I told him. He listened with intense though painful interest; and when I concluded said, with a deep sigh—

"How different has been his conduct towards you from mine!"

As soon as Melford had departed, the question with Devereux and his wife was where they should go to.

"Let us go to some fresh place," said Lady Clara.

"Wherever you will, dear Clara," was the answer.

"But have you no choice?" asked his wife, kindly.

Devereux shook his head gently but sadly, and leaning on the table, rested his head on his hand.

Lady Clara changed colour. She rose, laid her hand on his shoulder, and looked wistfully in his face.

"What is the matter, dear Augustus," she asked timidly. "All places are the same to me, so that you are pleased. I do but seek to find out your wishes. But you are very pale to-day. You are ill or in pain. I think you often suffer—I have long thought so. Will you not tell me—will you not—"

She paused. He took her hand, and with an air of grave kindness, made her sit down by him.

"I do not wonder," he said, sadly, "that you fear to question me — remembering the short, ungracious replies, or moody silence, with which I have too frequently received your kind remarks or questions. But that is all past now. Thank you for that look," he added, as she turned on him a glance full of love and confidence.

"All is indeed past," said Lady Clara, hurriedly, "except happiness. Mine, at least, will be complete if my friend—if our friend—will promise not to leave us yet."

'I most earnestly—most anxiously—join in that wish," said Devereux, looking towards me, as I sat silently at some distance with my eyes on a newspaper, but my thoughts with the two speakers.

I said I scarcely know what in reply. I felt that Devereux had something of evil to communicate; I knew his voice and the expression of his face so well. After a short pause he resumed—

"I trust, dear Clara, that *you* will be happy. Happiness is not for me in this world; nor could I contribute to yours, were I to continue with you."

"To continue with me!" faltered Lady Clara, turning deadly pale. "What can you —what do you mean?"

"No unkindness, believe me," said Devereux, tenderly. "But if I spoke of a natural and unavoidable separation—"

He stopped, and fixed an earnest and meaning gaze on her face.

"Separation!" she exclaimed, in a choking voice. "Now—now that—"

And overcome with emotion, she hid her face on his shoulder, and burst into tears.

"Evelyn, do not leave us!" said Devereux, imploringly, as thinking that the husband and wife might be best alone, I was about to slip quietly from the room. "Clara," he added, gently raising her, while an expression of pain, such as I had often seen, since the renewal of our intercourse, passed over his features—"Clara, I am ill, and you distress me!"

Lady Clara instantly checked her tears, and, though still trembling, listened with apparent calmness for what he should say next.

With much kind consideration for his wife's feelings, Devereux went on to tell us, that he had for some years laboured under disease of the heart, which recent excitement and over-exertion of mind and body had tended greatly to aggravate; that he had that morning consulted a physician of eminence, who had informed him that he could not live a year.

Poor Lady Clara's grief was violent and irrepressible; her self-reproach, though expressed but in few and broken sentences, was bitterly acute. It was evident that what weighed most on her mind, was that the shock her wrong conduct must have given him, had hastened the progress of his malady.

Nor was she mistaken, although Devereux would never, to the last, admit the fact to her—for he told me when we were alone, that on the day of her flight he had had an almost fatal attack of illness, from which however prompt medical assistance had for the time relieved him.

After the first, Lady Clara's sanguine temper led her to believe that Devereux's danger was exaggerated, that he might yet recover. I could not conscientiously encourage her in this hope, for although, now I was used to his appearance, he often did not look to me very ill, yet still I could not forget the first sight I had of him after the lapse of several years, when I was so struck by the change—when my first impression—however I sought to disguise it from myself at the time—had been that he was a dying man. I could hardly doubt that this first impression was the true one; I remembered other instances in which such had been the case; I was far from taking to myself any unusual acuteness on the subject, but when mortal disease has fastened on its prey, the learned physician and the unmedical observer are on a par of knowledge as regards the result; there rests on the countenance a shadow, as it were, from the wing of the Destroying Angel, which is visible alike to the ignorant and the experienced.

As Devereux had affairs which he wished to settle, it was decided that he and Lady Clara, who was now well enough to move, should pass some weeks, at least, at their own London residence. The following day, therefore, they exchanged the close foggy atmosphere of the city, for the more fresh and agreeable air of the Regent's Park. Both pressed me earnestly to be of the party, but as it was so long since I had been at home, I resolved to return there for a time; taking with me my faithful nurse, who, I knew, would enjoy seeing Percy and her former master and mistress again, and who deserved this reward after so much fatigue and anxiety.

How miserable or how hardened must that being be whose heart does not throb more quickly at the thought of home!

I had written to announce my return, and was met by all the family party and Lord Robert Rockingham. The latter was eager to show me his little son, who had improved wonderfully, and become quite amusing.

We all agreed that he was old enough to leave his village nurse; indeed, the last six months he had been almost always with my mother. Lord Robert had some thoughts of purchasing a small estate not more than a mile from Heathfield.

The following day, as we were walking together, he consulted me on the subject—having previously done much more wisely by consulting my uncle, who approved the plan—and when I cordially concurred, the young man said—

"I am thoroughly tired of leading an idle life, and mean to reform, and try to be useful for the remainder of my days.. Mr. Dalton says the land I propose to buy will repay cultivation, though, as it is in a dreadfully neglected state, I shall have a great deal of trouble. But I rather like that, for it will give me something to do, and the opportunity of employing labourers. And then I intend to educate little Robert—not all myself though. There is a college friend of mine, a very good fellow, who has met with reverses, and is reduced almost to poverty. He always had rather a fancy for being a tutor, and I thought of offering him a liberal salary to come and be Robert's tutor and my friend. You may be sure," added, Lord Robert, with feeling, "that if I can prevent it, nothing shall arise to remind him that he is any thing but my friend."

"I am sure of it," I interposed, warmly.

"And little Robert will not cause him to crack his brains with hard study at present. Have you seen any one who—I mean—"

"I understand you. No, I have no intention of making another matrimonial experiment, unless you should change your mind. Don't look grave, I am not going to renew that subject. Seriously, though without meaning any wrong to poor Barbara's memory, I am come to the conclusion that one wife is enough for one life-time. With Johnson and my little boy, and my new occupations, and your family for neighbours, I don't doubt being very happy. Poor Johnson, he was very kind to me at college. He helped me out of many a scrape, and never ridiculed me or played me tricks as many others did. But look, there is my little chap coming. See, he leaves his nurse to run to me. It's very extraordinary, but he will leave every one else in the world to run to me. What has Robert got? A letter?"

"Here, gov'nor!" lisped Robert.

"Do you hear that?" cried his father, turning to me in an ecstasy of delight. "I have taught him to call me governor, already. That, and 'old fellow,' is all he ever calls me. Is not it curious?"

I said that it was very curious, and did not say just then that I thought 'father' a prettier mode of address.

After taking the child up and embracing him, Lord Robert opened the letter.

"It is from Johnson," he said. "He accepts my proposals with pleasure and gratitude. Robert, my boy, you are going to have a tutor; such a jolly fellow! Shall you like a tutor, Robert?"

"Don't know. Is it good to eat?" asked Robert.

His father burst into a peal of laughter.

"I never in all my life knew such a remarkable child. Is he not a wag?"

I of course assented, and then the infant prodigy was asked who I was, having been taught to pronounce my name the evening before. He replied, "Pwetty gal!" winking as he spoke, which brought his fond parent's admiration to a climax.

"I hope you will not spoil little Robert," said I.

"Spoil him! Oh! no; I teach him all sorts of things."

"Yes, I am afraid you teach him too much."

"So am I," said my uncle, who had just joined us. "I know it is much the fashion in the present day to teach children queer tricks and slang; but we should remember that the same amount of pains-taking would teach them something useful and improving. For myself, I own I am old-fashioned enough to prefer seeing children like children, not aping grown people, or rather grown people's follies.

"Little Robert is so quick, and such a dear little thing," I observed, "seeing that his poor father looked somewhat crest-fallen at these comments; "that it would be a thousand pities he should not have every advantage in training. But, dear uncle, you do not know what our kind, thoughtful friend has been planning."

And I told of the tutor scheme, on hearing which my uncle cast one of his approving, benevolent glances on Lord Robert, who brightened up immediately, and we were soon busily discussing the young man's future prospects.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT.

There was so much to see and to hear, and to be interested in, at the beloved home from which I had been so long absent, that notwithstanding the one painful subject that was never long out of my thoughts, days lengthened into weeks, and weeks into months, and still it seemed as though I had but just returned.

Devereux and his wife, meanwhile, after remaining a few weeks in London, passed the summer and autumn on the Continent.

They wished me to be of the party; but I had been away from home so much of late, that my mother and uncle were unwilling to spare me; so the request was not urged.

I received frequent letters from Lady Clara. From them I gathered that Devereux showed his wife the greatest kindness and consideration. It seemed to be the chief, or, indeed, the only object of his existence to cheer and console her for all that she had undergone. The only drawback to this happiness was the uncertain state of his health; but though weak and often suffering, she said he never seemed to think of himself. Travelling by very easy stages, and frequently stopping for a week in some agreeable locality, the change of air and scene appeared rather to do him good than harm.

The end of September had been fixed on for their return, and I was engaged to go to them immediately on their arrival in England; but just before the time of setting out, a serious attack of illness rendered Devereux unfit to travel for several weeks.

The gloomy month of November came, with its fogs and fast shortening days. I was very anxious, for a longer time than usual had elapsed without hearing of my friends; when I got a letter, which contained an improved account of Devereux, and in which Lady Clara confided to me, with many expressions of joy, and of gratitude to Heaven, her hope that a child might be again added to their family. "I rejoice," she wrote, "even more for my husband's sake than for my own, in the hope that it may console him for the loss of little Augustus. For the first time he has spoken of our lost infant, whom I have never dared allude to in his presence; and we sorrowed together."

Soon after this another letter reached me, stating that Devereux had had another attack of illness, and was, as well as his wife, anxious to return to England immediately. "My reason," wrote Lady Clara, "is that we may have better medical advice for Augustus. He grieved me deeply by saying that *his* reason for wishing to be in London 'is to accelerate, if possible, the termination of a troublesome lawsuit, so that his property might descend unembarrassed to his wife, and to the child he shall never see.' This is almost the first time that he has alluded to the future with melancholy foreboding, since that sad day when —— But I will hope, and he is already better again."

It was early in December when letters from both informed me of their arrival in Portland Place; and begged me to lose no time in joining them, My mother and uncle, knowing Devereux's state of health, made no objection to my doing so. My uncle, who had felt as much indignation against Devereux as it was possible for so good a man to feel against any one, had softened at once on hearing of his illness.

"Poor fellow," my uncle would often say, "I wish I could be of use or comfort to him. He had some terribly strange views on religious subjects. I trust that now he sees their fallacy, and has become a sincere believer."

On reaching Portland Place, where, owing to some alteration of the trains, I arrived half an hour sooner than I was expected, I was shown into the drawing-room. Only Devereux was there, sitting in an arm-chair reading. My appearance agitated him; he pressed his hand to his heart, and gasped for breath. Alarmed, I led him back to the seat from which he had risen, and brought him a glass of water that stood near. He waved it away, and making an effort, said—

"This is a strange welcome, but old associations rise up and —— It was in this very room that I first saw you—it seemed to me that I had often seen your face before in my dreams. It was here that we parted—oh!

what fiend possessed me then! Before my two long years of exile had elapsed I repented; but pride held me back, and then the false report that you were married to Courteney. Had I but followed my first impulse to return and throw myself at your feet—you would have forgiven me, Evelyn—how different might have been our fates!"

"Calm yourself," I exclaimed, scarcely knowing what I said. "It was ordained that all should happen so; and, therefore, we are bound to think it right."

"It is true," he continued, without heeding me, "that I was not worthy of your love; but what might not that love and your influence have effected?"

"Hush! hush!" I exclaimed, "you mnst not speak thus. Mr. Devereux, you will make me repent that I have come here!"

A flush rose to his brow, again he pressed his hand to his heart, as if from pain, then turning away, said in a broken voice—

"You are hard upon me, Evelyn."

I took his hand hastily, and could only falter out—

"*I* hard upon you, Augustus, and now!"

Retaining my hand, he gave me a look—such a look—in which the remorse and affection, and agony of a life-time seemed concentrated. The past in one strong overwhelming tide rushed back over my heart. Quick rising sobs, that I sought in vain to stifle, broke forth with irrepressible violence. I covered my face with the hand that was at liberty, and strove to disengage the other.

Devereux rose slowly, and after standing beside me for a few moments, said—

"I will not again distress you thus. Hear me, dearest Evelyn—nay start not that I call you so—you are, you must always be—very dear to me. The feeling is not voluntary, for I can no more prevent it than I can prevent the throbbing of my heart—and I trust not sinful, for I think and speak as a dying man—as one who in a short time will have done with earthly loves and passions. Will you, then, bear with me?"

"I was wrong to give way to my grief," I answered; "but to see you thus, and to know — Oh! how you tremble, and you were to avoid all excitement. You will be the worse for this."

"No matter," he said, faintly, when I had made him recline on a couch. "It is thus I would die—thus with you near me. And, Evelyn—promise—promise me that when the last struggle comes—when my soul is about to enter the dark valley, you will not leave me—not till—all is over!"

"Oh! no, no! but be silent now," I said, alarmed by his languor and difficult breathing. "Where is Lady Clara? I will go and seek her."

Lady Clara at this moment entered, looking well, and bright, and happy. She had only just heard of my arrival, whilst preparing to go and meet me at the station.

"He is not worse," she asked, when she had embraced me affectionately.

Devereux smiled kindly on her, and answered in the negative.

"He has been so much better the last few days," she added, cheerfully, "that I am sure, with care and good nursing, he will get well."

I then saw her look kindly and anxiously at me, as she removed my bonnet and put back my hair.

"How flushed your cheeks are!" she said. "I suppose it is coming from the bleak wind to this large fire. Shall I show you your room?"

I gladly followed her. The room—the same I used to occupy in former days—was arranged with evident regard to giving me pleasure. Several beautiful hot-house plants in full bloom graced the windows, a writing table most carefully furnished, on which was a vase of white marble, filled with flowers, stood in the centre; on one side was a small bookcase containing, as I afterwards found, the works of most of my favourite poets and authors; some fine landscapes by first rate masters, soft, mellow, and poetical, hung on the walls, seeming fit companions for two or three exquisite groups of sculpture, also in white marble, and brought from the continent, while over the mantelpiece hung a lovely picture of Lady Clara and her two boys. The furniture was new and in the best taste; the prevaling colour of the walls and carpet being a light delicate green, with curtains of white and rose colour. A small canopied bed stood at the farthest end, and near the fire were several luxurious arm chairs, and a most inviting little couch.

"This is to be your room always," said my kind hostess. "Yours entirely and exclusively. I am glad you appear to like it."

"You are too kind—a great deal too kind to me, dear Lady Clara."

"How could I be too kind to you?" she said again embracing me. "It was a great amusement superintending these arrangements during the month we were here before we went abroad. Augustus was constantly shut up with his men of business, and I had nothing to do. You see I remembered your favourite colours; and that you like to open your eyes on graceful and agreeable objects."

I could only imperfectly express my thanks; for this proof of her thoughtful kindness and affection touched me deeply.

"If you knew how we love you, and how we have missed you," she said with emotion. "Do I not owe to you all my present happiness?"

There was a pause, and then I turned to look at the picture over the mantel-piece.

"It was just completed when our poor baby died," said Lady Clara. "It is only since our return that I have had courage to get it unpacked. I longed to look upon my lost children's faces once more, and after the first painful feeling have derived real pleasure and comfort from the picture. Shall we show it to Augustus, or would it be too trying for him?"

I approved of showing him the picture; and that evening Lady Clara drew him into my room, which he had not yet seen in its present state; and after he had gratified her by commending her taste, we all three stood before the painting. Tears dimmed his eyes as they first rested on it, but he gazed, again and again; and the sight seemed still more to soften his heart towards his wife, as I had hoped and expected it would.

The following day brought intelligence of an event which gave us real pleasure; the marriage of Melford with Kate Chester. The young couple both wrote; they seemed warmly and sincerely attached to each other, and were full of happy prospects and plans for the future.

That day passed tranquilly and happily; as did many successive days and weeks. Lady Clara and I read and worked, and in the evenings we often sang. I usually took a walk in the park; and sometimes when the invalid was well enough we all drove out. Devereux was almost constantly with us, and never before had I seen him so kind and gentle and considerate of others, or—with the exception of occasional troubled moments—so happy. His intellect shone out clear and bright as ever; and he drew me, as in former years, into discussions on our favourite subjects. It was interesting once more to compare our thoughts, and to discover how, and in what degree, further experience of life had changed our sentiments. Naturally our discourse often took a more serious tone from Devereux's situation. I was most anxious to learn his present views of religion, but though we spoke of life and death, and immortality, his remarks were chiefly philosophical or speculative, and he seemed rather to evade any direct expression either of hope or faith.

When Lady Clara was present, I always drew her into our discussions, although perhaps the deepest and most earnest took place when we were for a short time alone together This was not unfrequently; for when Lady Clara was obliged to be absent, instead of taking me with her, or leaving me to my own pursuits, as she would have done under ordinary circumstances, she would often beg me to remain with her husband, both because he liked my society, and because she dreaded his having a sudden attack of his complaint with no one near but servants. An old friend had lately returned to England in reduced circumstances and ill health, and as she knew scarcely any one in London but Lady Clara, the kind heart of the latter led her to pay almost daily visits to the sick woman.

Lady Clara, I perceived, still entertained most sanguine hopes of Devereux's recovery, or at least looked upon the danger of his disease as very remote. She was so happy in his kindness, and in the domestic peace so new to her, that it seemed cruel to undeceive her, and say "this cannot last." She often observed that my presence greatly added to her happiness.

"You seem," she said, "to bring me nearer to my husband's mind and heart. Since hearing him talk so much with you, I understand him better than in all our previous lives."

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLOSING SCENE.

Devereux was true to his promise of never alluding to the relation in which we had once stood to each other, we were as old friends and nothing more, and thus every shadow of constraint was removed from our intercourse.

Three months glided by, bringing apparently but little change for the worse in his state, except that the attacks of pain had become more frequent and more severe. In the intervals he appeared tolerably well, and could not bear to be considered as an invalid.

It was Sunday. I had been to church alone in the morning, and Lady Clara had expressed a wish to attend the second service if I would remain with Devereux, but as the time approached, she changed her mind and said she would not go.

"Why not?" asked Devereux, kindly.

"Because you have several times looked so pale, and I am afraid you are more ill."

I looked up anxiously, for I had also remarked his fearful paleness, and shared her alarm.

But he smiled, and argued away her fears, and insisted that she should go; and also call on her sick friend Mrs. Ellsmere afterwards.

I was sitting at the far end of the smaller drawing-room reading, while Devereux, in the other, was gazing from the window abstractedly, when Lady Clara re-entered, dressed for walking. On pretext of finding her prayer-book, she approached her husband.

"You look better now, dear Augustus," she observed.

"Thank you, for your kindness to me," he said, with emotion; "and say that you forgive me all the unhappy moments I have caused you."

"It is only your illness which causes me any," she said, giving him her hand. "Were you but well—"

"It is better thus," said Devereux, gravely. "I am now softened and subdued by disease. Were I to recover I should be again selfish, jealous, ill-tempered."

"I do not believe it; but why do you ask me to forgive you now?"

"Only because it is my humour."

"Farewell then, for the present."

He pressed her hand to his lips, and then, as if by a sudden impulse of kind feeling, drew her gently towards him, and kissed her brow.

"Farewell, Clara. Will you pray for me?"

"I always do," she said, with emotion, and hurriedly quitted the room.

Devereux threw himself upon a seat; I continued reading in silence for nearly a quarter of an hour. He then, coming towards me, asked me what I was reading.

"A book," I answered, tremblingly, "on which I fear you set too little value."

"And do you value and act up to it as you ought?" he asked, with somewhat of his old ironical manner.

"Oh! no, no," I answered, with a thrill of painful feeling. "I often feel as if I were a sad hypocrite, to know and profess so much, and to perform so little!"

"Will you read to me?" he said, with his wonted gentleness. "I have a great wish to hear some of that book just now."

I gladly complied, and read some passages from St. Paul's epistles, especially that to the Hebrews, showing the necessity and use of a Mediator; and then parts of the fourteenth and three following chapters of the last and most touching of the gospels.

When I closed the book, he looked full in my face, and asked if I believed all that.

"Oh yes," I answered; "I cannot—dare not doubt. Oh! Augustus, you do not doubt, do you?"

My voice trembled, and my breath came short and thick with emotion that I could not suppress. He still gazed at me.

"Why are you thus agitated?" he asked, while his voice was also unsteady.

"Because I too have had doubts, which have made me more miserable than all other trials—than the loss of your love—than the death of friends — which intruded in my happiest moments to poison and embitter all!"

"But do you doubt now—and what were your difficulties?"

"No, thank God, I do not doubt now. One of my difficulties was that the scheme for man's redemption from sin seemed too extraordinary a condesension of the Divine Being, who could have saved us by other means. And then I thought that my anxious desire to believe might make me credulous—that faith ought not to come from habit and early impressions, but from conviction."

"Well?"

"Within the last six months I determined to read and judge for myself, as though the subject were new and for the first time presented to me."

"And the result?"

"Was full conviction. Once satisfied by external evidence of the authenticity of the Scriptures, I sought in them with confidence, for refutation of my doubts. I found that although Infinite Mercy might will our pardon on easier terms, Infinite Justice and Truth, which are—though too many people forget it in their creed—equally Divine attributes, could not be satisfied in any other way than by that tremendous sacrifice."

"And what led you to this investigation?"

"The unutterable misery of scepticism. Never, never have I breathed a word to human being, besides yourself, of the dead weight at my heart. May God forgive those who helped to lay it there!"

"I—I—was one of those," said Devereux, tremulously.

"You were; but not the first. When I was a mere child, a man of high talent and deep learning used to speak of his infidel opinions in my hearing. My uncle argued with him, but the unbeliever's arguments always appeared to me the strongest. It might be that he had more wit and eloquence. I saw him looked up to as an oracle on other subjects—if such a man doubts, I thought—Years later, I sought in the writings and lives of great men, and discovering that many, eminent for genius, had been sceptics, while my own personal experience in the world showed the same, I took up the idea that it was the proof of a great intellect, and a vivid imagination to doubt—that revelation was only for the multitude—that a vague philosophical poetical feeling of religion was all that truth permitted to the enlightened few—amongst whom I daringly classed myself."

"I should have thought," said Devereux, that you would hold to Pope's creed.

" He can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

"A most dangerous creed! And whose life is always in the right?"

"Not mine," said Devereux, sighing, "my soul is loaded with guilt. But you—what sin have you, and many others of your sex and class committed?"

"Perhaps as many in proportion to our light and knowledge as the greatest criminal. A person in my circumstances, and educated as I have been, has no temptation to commit gross crimes. But is not an unkind word, a wrong thought, an opportunity of doing good neglected, as great a sin in our case, as a theft, a lie, or perhaps a murder in another?"

"You are right," said Devereux, "I only wanted to hear what you would say."

"Oh, dear Augustus, leave off trifling and speculating! Think how awfully important it is that we should know and cling to the truth."

There was a pause, and I had leisure to reflect how different a turn the conversation had taken from what I intended. Instead of leading Devereux to make a confession, I had been making one myself, and was not a whit better acquainted with his opinions.

"I have indeed no time for trifling," said Devereux, at last, with great seriousness, "Perhaps I have always believed more than I professed to believe. I feel that except through a Saviour, there is no hope for me—if indeed," he added, vainly struggling to suppress strong emotion, "my guilt is not of too deep a dye."

Turning again to the Bible, I read—

"*Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet yet shall they be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*"

He listened with breathless eagerness.

"How much," he said, when I had read various other verses to the same effect; how much in that volume have I hitherto overlooked, or read only to criticise and cavil!"

I thought he was becoming too excited for his health, and therefore said that we would renew the conversation some other time.

"Oh, Evelyn," he exclaimed, with passionate earnestness, "who knows that for me there may be another time! What deep wisdom is there in the warning—which constantly uttered by preachers and moralists, seems so hackneyed and common-place—not to defer preparation for death until near the close of existence! Now I would fain speak and think more, but physical pain and weakness are distracting my thoughts—"

He paused abruptly, and was for some time silent.

"I fear you are suffering much?" I said, at length.

"No matter, it will soon be over," he answered, "there, I am better now. I long to breathe the fresh air once more. Will you walk a short distance with me?"

I hesitated, and reminded him that Dr. W——, had advised very little exertion; but he pressed the request so earnestly, promising not to go far, that I could not refuse.

Very slowly we passed the short length of intervening street, and stood upon the soft green sward.

Winter, the temporary death of nature, had already begun to give place to spring. A bright ray of sunshine gleamed out, and the trees, so lately bare and lifeless, were bursting forth with fresh and living verduce.

"Is not this," I said, softly, to Devereux, "at once a type and a guarantee of our resurrection? Could all the small inanimate things of nature be restored, and man, whose form is an image of the deity, whose soul is a portion of the divine essence, be left to perish!"

We had, I believe, mechanically, moved on to a retired spot, one of our frequent haunts in former years, and we sat down on a bench under a tree.

Devereux, whom the fresh air had greatly revived, looked around for some moments.

"Strange," he said, "that one small spot of earth, a little water, a few trees, should recall so much! Evelyn, when I am no more, will you sometimes come here and think of me?"

I could not answer, and he proceeded—

"I would that I could read your future, Evelyn. Often as I look at you I think it will not be a long one. Should I be mistaken, you will form new ties and forget old—" he paused and then added—"friends."

"Never the last; and for the first—I feel no wish for—for more ties to this earth."

Devereux now spoke of Lady Clara.

"She will feel my death at first," he said, "but she will soon be reconciled. I need not ask you to be kind to her. She should not be alone. I wish—"

"What do you wish? If any thing in my power to do for you or her—"

"That, for a time, you would take her with you to Heathfield, if your uncle—"

I assured him she would be a most welcome guest, that all my family were disposed to love her, and that my uncle was never so happy as when endeavouring to soothe those in affliction.

He thanked me gratefully, and we rose and turned our steps homeward. I observed that he seemed weaker, and before we had gone far a spasm of pain seized him, and he paused and gasped for breath. The attack passed off, but recurred several times during the remainder of the walk. In terror and distress I reproached myself with having allowed him to make a hurtful exertion.

" Do not regret it," he said. " Suppose the exertion shortens by a few hours or days my fast waning term of existence, what does it matter ?"

At length we reached the house, and were once again in the drawing-room. My companion was faint and exhausted. I arranged the cushions of his sofa, and brought his medicine.

As he took the glass from my hand, he said—

" You look pale and worn. I have been the dark shadow of your life, Evelyn! Nay, do not contradict me."

"You are better now?" I asked, presently.

"Much."

Observing him glance towards the Bible, which lay open, I proposed reading again. He eagerly accepted the offer, and I read the description of the future abode of the blessed in the two last chapters of Revelations. He listened with deep interest, and when I had finished, recurred to the earlier verses. I again read the words:—

"*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away..........And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying: neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*"

As I raised my eyes from the book, I saw an expression of hope and joy on Devereux's face. He partly rose from his reclining posture, and seemed about to speak, when the look of suffering I had learned to dread came over his features, and with a short, quick sigh, he sunk back with parted lips and closed eyes. I thought he had fainted, and hastily rang for assistance.

At this moment Lady Clara and Dr. W—— entered together.

"Oh, I am so glad you are come!" I said to the latter.

The physician approached his patient, looked for a few moments at the pale face, on which there was now no trace of suffering, and then turned to us with an expression in his own that could not be mistaken.

Devereux was dead!

CHAPTER X.

CONSCIENCE.

In accordance with Devereux's last wish, and the kind feelings of my mother and uncle, who were almost as anxious about my poor friend as I was, she was cordially invited to make Heathfield Rectory her home for as long a period as should be agreeable.

She accepted the proposal with gratitude, and immediately after the funeral accompanied me to my home. It was there that—before she had been three days our guest—her fatherless child first saw the light.

When I was admitted for a few minutes to her room, some hours after the birth of the infant—which, to its mother's great joy, was a girl—she reminded me, with tears, that it was this very day twelvemonth that I had followed her and Melford on board the steamer.

"Do not think of that now," I said, tenderly. "Think of the darling that Heaven has sent to console you in your sorrow."

She smiled through her tears, and then, sobbing, murmured the name of Augustus.

"He is, I trust, so happy," I answered, "that he would not return to us, even if he could. He will not, it is true, see his child's face on earth, but he will meet her, when this life is over, in Heaven. You will be calm now, for her sake?"

The intensity of a mother's love is proverbial; but never have I seen a child so fondly loved, so watched, and treasured, and doted on, as was my god-child and namesake, the little Evelyn Devereux. I had wished her to be called Augusta, but Lady Clara said she and her husband had settled, that if a girl, the child should be baptized Evelyn, as they both preferred that name to any other.

With this little being Lady Clara seemed to have received new life and happiness. Although, at first, she grieved deeply for Devereux's death, she gradually became calm and resigned. She had no wish ever to return to the gay world of fashion. She expressed her intention of devoting great part of her handsome income to charitable purposes, and her time to the education of her child. I do not mean to imply that she suddenly turned hermit, or that she ceased to cultivate any of her former friendships which were worthy of the name. She remembered that a person in her position, with her social advantages, had duties to perform to society as well as to those immediately connected with her, but she knew that the performance of these duties is compatible with the relinquishment of frivolous pursuits and pleasures, in which so many who are capable of better things, engage, because they cannot find, or think they cannot find worthier employment.

* * * * *

It has been remarked, that no one learns from the experience of another, that in order to be wise, each individual must think, feel, and suffer for himself. Hitherto I had denied the truth of this assertion as invalidating the utility of example, but a new and painful phase of life convinced me that, although in some points we may learn from the experience of others, yet, as regards the most important ones, nothing will avail but our own. I had thought that from understanding Devereux so well, and watching him so closely, during the latter part of his life, I could tell precisely what would be my feelings in similar circumstances. But I was greatly mistaken.

A few weeks after returning home my health gave way: I grew weak and thin, and the cough and hectic fever which had for some time been gradually creeping on, became suddenly much aggravated. Strange to say, symptoms which would have alarmed me in another, appeared trifling in my own case. Such self-delusion, I have since thought, is equally common in moral as in physical disease. Faults which would shock us in others, we pardon or perhaps even do not discover in ourselves.

In spite of my earnest assurances that I should be soon quite well again, my uncle and a medical friend insisted on taking me to one of the London physicians most consulted for chest complaints.

It was not until some little time afterwards, that being startled by the circumstance of two or three village favourites bursting into tears when admitted to see me, it for the first time struck me that I might be seriously ill, and I resolved to ask our usual medical attendant, who was an attached friend of the family, what opinion the doctor had expressed. The next day, when I happened to see him alone, I did so.

The kind-hearted and conscientious man had already more than once hinted at danger, but I had wilfully misunderstood his warnings, or thought he exaggerated to make me careful.

Finding me unusually serious, my good friend, I believe, thought that he had alarmed me too much; and in answer to my enquiries, said, as if anxious to give me all the comfort in his power, that neither the physician nor himself considered my case quite hopeless. It was possible I might recover, or, at least, that the disease might be checked in its progress for some years—but it was right to warn me that, though possible, this was not probable. As he concluded, I saw that he had tears in his eyes, for he was a man of most acute feelings—too much so, indeed, for his trying profession, as far as he himself was concerned—to me he had always been as kind as an elder brother, and I considered him as such. This was enough. My eyes were now thoroughly opened, and I only wondered that I had been so blind before.

After listening while the doctor spoke sensibly and with feeling on the evils of the world, and the advantages of quitting it young, I thanked him for his kindness and sympathy, told him that I felt what he said was true; and, on his departure, sought my own room, and gave way to the new and strange agony with which my heart was bursting.

It was true that I had always wished and prayed—rashly and wickedly, perhaps—that I might die young—but how different were those vague and distant anticipations of death from its distinct and near prospect! Probably there are many who can look forward calmly enough to dying in a few years; but make the term definite—say that in six months, or a year, they will be called away, and the calm is changed to terror. At least it was so with me.

Viewed by the "keen light of death," every thing wore an altered aspect.

My past life especially. How culpable did it now appear—my conduct how worldly! How little good had I done! How many opportunities of serving others had I neglected! Above all, how cold and indifferent had I been in my religious duties—how absorbed by ambition! How calmly had I sometimes listened while others spoke lightly on serious subjects, or abstained from speaking boldly on the opposite side, for fear of ridicule, or of being stigmatised as wishing to be better than my companions. I had striven to become wiser than the generality of people; I had laboured to excel them in intellect; but in a nobler ambition how little earnestness or steadiness of purpose had I evinced?

It is true I had sought to promote the welfare of those I loved; but where was the merit? since I had only followed the strongest impulse of my own feelings. And even for these few—might I not have done much more? Why had I not long ago sought to lead Devereux to the only true source of consolation? Why did I not, in the early days of our acquaintance, urge him strongly and constantly to seek relief from One who said to the children of men—"*Surely I have borne your griefs and carried your sorrows*"—and pardon for his sins from "*Him on whom is laid the iniquity of us all?*"

Even at the last might I not have done or said more? had I used my influence to its full extent?

On the other hand, the world suddenly became possessed, in my eyes, of a thousand new attractions—the face of nature had never, since the earliest days of youth, seemed so fair, nor the friends yet left so dear. To leave all things so loved and so familiar—for what? Religion whispered, "for a better world"—human feeling said, "for some strange, unknown region;" and human nature shrank shuddering from the change.

In vain I argued with myself on the folly of wishing to remain fettered by a weak, imperfect body; reason, as is always the case during the first outbreak of strong emotion, was entirely powerless.

A disembodied soul launched forth into the invisible world! Time, and earth, and all things tangible through the senses, left behind. Those senses themselves, what was to supply their place? How was the soul to be guided, or to guide itself, and where? To some other planet! To Heaven! Where was Heaven! I gazed up into the clear sky. My mortal vision could pierce but a very short distance—the spiritual was equally obscured.

What had I done to deserve Heaven? Was I not an unprofitable servant? I knew that no one is without sin; but might I not be one of those who have "*sinned against light and knowledge*," to whom is reserved the "*blackness of darkness for ever?*"

Verses of Scripture, containing threats to those who have been neglectful or lukewarm, thronged on my mind, and if promises came among them, there came with each promise a plain proof that I could not claim an interest in it.

Then, amidst these solemn thoughts intruded the thought of a manuscript, yet unfinished, which I considered far superior to any of my former writings. I felt that it would almost break my heart to leave this favourite work uncompleted; and then I was overcome with remorse that I should feel so much on such a subject at such a time.

In vain I said over and over to myself, "Fame is a chimera—an empty thing, even if I might attain it—the desire so strongly implanted in some breasts to leave a name that will be remembered—not to go down to the grave as one of the multitude, whose very existence is unknown to the succeeding generation—this desire, which must have been innate, for it had come with the first dawn of reason—seemed stronger than ever.

But must I really die? I knew that Dr. W—— was one of the few whose judgment is considered infallible. But then he *might* be mistaken in my case. Besides, he had said it was not quite hopeless. Not quite! How I clung to the faint hope admitted by these words.

"I *will* live!" I exclaimed, half aloud, and then, shocked at my impiety, flung myself on my knees, and sobbed out a prayer. "Oh God, spare my life—spare it but for a few years!" was all that I could say; and I repeated the words over and over in wild agony, I tried to add—"if it be Thy will;" but in my present state of mind the phrase seemed a falsehood—a mockery.

I wondered if other people felt thus. Some I knew did not. Was that because they were better prepared to die? How was I to prepare for death? Could I but be sure of a few years, I would devote them to prayer, and to the service of others. I would do my best to atone for past faults and past neglect. How would I watch my words, and actions, and thoughts, and guard against the smallest inroad of evil. But suppose that only a few months more of life were granted me, what could I do? How, amidst increasing languor and disease, was I to carry out one of my good resolutions? I could, at least, be patient, and disguise this terrible struggle from those I loved. I would appear cheerful and happy to the last. They should think that I was resigned. I must be calm now, or my emotion would be observed.

I rose and arranged my dress and hair, for it was near the dinner hour. As I did so, my eyes rested on a mirror. I involuntarily paused, and gazed, as if on some other being.

"What," I asked myself, "can death have to do with a face still so bright with the hues of life and youth—with a form, whose every pulse seems throbbing with a painful intensity of existence?"

Alas, are not thousands younger, fairer, and more vigorous, cut down every day? Then I recalled to mind something I had overheard Mr. Johnson, little Rockingham's tutor, say to Lord Robert about the light in my eyes being too bright and spirit-like, which remark I had smiled at as very absurd, only the day before. It did not seem so now.

I turned away, and descended to the drawing-room. Lord Robert, and two or three other friends, dined with us. It was a cheerful, pleasant party, and there was much conversation. But although I laughed and talked with the rest, it was mechanically.

It seemed so strange to be speaking and thinking of trifles in my circumstances: to hear people planning for the future, and to know that my future in this world was comprised in a few months. Then, as I looked at my tender-hearted uncle, at my gentle mother, at the handsome, affectionate brother I was so proud of, at my beloved friend, Lady Clara, who, with her sweet babe, had become completely part of the family—all selfish regret was merged in sorrow for the shock which my death would cause these dear ones.

Days passed, and a bright, glorious summer came. I laid for hours on a couch under the shady trees on the lawn, sometimes reading, more often gazing on the brilliant flower-beds, the waving trees, and the soft sky. The sweet sights and sounds of nature filled my heart with a deep and inexpressible melancholy. Even when I could now and then bring myself to look on death with less dread and horror, I felt that

> "Still the thought
> Of leaving all familiar objects thus—
> The friends we love, and who return our love,
> The sweet entrancements of domestic bliss,
> The thousand things that twine around our hearts,
> The silken cords of fondness, hath in it
> A sadness which the hope of better things
> Chastens but not destroys."

And my "hope of better things" was, as yet, too weak and ill-assured to afford me much comfort. I still thought too much of the efficacy of works. I wished to *deserve* Heaven. I felt that I had not hitherto, and when I remembered how often, in spite of the awful consciousness of impending death, which never forsook me—I sinned in thought, if not in word or deed, I began to fear that I never should. I felt strongly and painfully that it is impossible to act up to the standard of Christian perfection even for one single hour.

My mental disquietude, at this time, was greatly increased by the conversation of a clergyman, who was much at my uncle's. He constantly endeavoured to persuade me that it was sinful to read or write works of imagination, however moral or instructive their tendency; and as he was a man of talent and learning, his opinion had much weight with me. He represented the past years of my life as lamentably wasted, and said that if I should be restored to health, I ought to join the Sisters of Mercy, or go to teach the heathen.

I felt that there was no sacrifice I would not, or ought not to make, if but a few years were added to my life.

All this time I suffered little, except from debility and extreme restlessness. I had a strange feeling of being more awake by night than by day—for in the still, silent hours, the faces of the friends who had come to see me would appear more distinctly; words that had made an impression again sounded in my ears; as I lay worn out and half wild from want of sleep.

I would try to pray, but my thoughts wandered, and strange, unmeaning words intervened in the midst of the petitions my heart would fain have offered up. Then I would think that I was wholly abandoned, and given over to the powers of evil; and my anguish would break forth in sobs.

I had been all my life susceptible of strong religious impressions, but they were wild, fitful, and ill-regulated. Under some form or other the subject was almost constantly present to my mind. When apparently joining with others in ordinary pursuits, some deep question, half psychological, half religious—for I confounded the two—would be occupying my thoughts and agitating my heart. I had studied the Bible for hours together, but too much as though it were a book of mere earthly origin:—perplexed and unsatisfied, yet with a deep sense of the importance of virtue and self-sacrifice, I had striven to subdue evil in myself and others, and I had many times fasted myself ill. I had adopted and rejected a variety of creeds. I mistook creeds for Christianity—the inanimate corse for the vital spark.

Then, disgusted by instances of prejudice, violent party spirit, and most unchristian want of charity among sects, I concluded that all sectarians were bigots, and lapsed into a state to which the most bigoted sectarianism is preferable.

I had always, through all, prayed constantly and earnestly, but my prayers had, of late, been of far too proud and arrogant a character. I had asked for blessings as a right, not implored them as a favour, I had dared, in thought, to arraign the wisdom and justice of the All-wise and All-just, if His will accorded not with my will. I had murmured at being called on to believe mysteries which I could not comprehend, but which I believed myself capable of comprehending. I had not prayed from my heart, to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, because I knew not in what manner the Spirit works in us. Now I felt awed and deeply humbled, but my mind was, as yet, in a state of chaos. I feared to confide all to my good uncle, or to my mother, lest they should be shocked and grieved at finding in their beloved child doubts and difficulties which they were too pious to have ever experienced. I would not seek sympathy from my brother or Lady Clara, for fear of infecting them with my mental disorder.

In the meanwhile, all that human love and care could do, was done for me. Not only did intimate friends show me kindness, but all the neighbourhood, and many comparatively strangers, who I was unaware took the slightest interest in me, gave proofs of kind feeling. In deep interest and affection for those around me, and in striving to be of some slight use or comfort to them—though it was little indeed that I could do, I found the best refuge from painful thoughts.

And thus the summer wore away. Early in autumn, to my great grief, I was ordered to leave home, for the milder air of Devonshire. What tears and sorrowful leave-takings preceded that journey! Lady Clara was to pass the winter with some relatives in the North; she would have accompanied my mother and myself, but that both she and her child were ordered a more bracing air. Percy's studies kept him in or near London, and my uncle was unable to leave his parish.

CHAPTER II.

CONCLUSION.

How little are we able to judge beforehand, what events are, and what are not for our good, in a temporal, much more in a spiritual point of view!

The residence, in a strange place, and among people I had never seen before, which I had so much dreaded, proved a most fortunate circumstance for me. At first I was very ill and very miserable, but before long the worst symptoms of my complaint began to subside, and I seemed as if awaking to a new but very feeble life. Many of those whom I met quickly ceased to be strangers, and became dear friends. This was the more valuable, that my mother was soon obliged to return home, owing to the ill effect of the relaxing climate on her health, leaving me in the care of a kind old lady, a distant relative. Although some of the friendships thus formed, terminated, as might have been foretold, painfully, there are others which I hope may last for the rest of my existence—or rather which, I pray, may not be ended with this brief life.

There I learned that the deepest and most earnest piety can exist in union with the highest talents and the noblest intellect—that imagination, like all other good gifts and powers, whether of mind or body, may be exercised without sin ; there I learned, at last, that nothing can bring peace to the soul in its time of sorest trial, but a simple, confiding, child-like faith.

Were I not so near the close of these memoirs I would attempt, however feebly and imperfectly, to describe the character of at least one of these friends—his whose influence over me for good was the greatest—who, from having a mind in some respects constituted like my own, although very far superior, could enter into, without being shocked at my doubts and anxieties, and enlightened without humbling me by his knowledge—while yet teaching me even more by what he was than by what he said.

"A consumptive lover!" exclaimed a flippant friend to whom I sometime afterwards spoke of this individual. "No, he was neither a lover nor consumptive. "Some venerable old divine then?" No, he was neither old, nor a clergyman. He was a man in the prime of life, and his profession one which affords even more scope perhaps than does that of a clergyman for giving comfort and hope, when the weakened and helpless state of the body renders the heart peculiarly desirous of more than earthly consolation, which pride or prejudice may prevent its seeking or attending to from one whose business is professedly the care of souls.

I know that in accordance with conventional rules, the fates of all the personages in this story ought to come to a crisis at once; and close at the same time the book and their career, either by death or marriage. The last manner is, I am aware, the most approved and popular, and is considered by the general reader as perfectly satisfactory. But is this consistent with truth and real life? Doubtless marriage must form an important epoch in the life of every one; but must not the period succeeding that epoch—and involving new duties, joys and trials—be equally important to the character, and consequently to the history of the individual, as the period preceding it?

As these pages are—not a record of the sorrows of a sentimental heroine, but the plain matter-of-fact history of an ordinary inhabitant of this world, living and conversing with every day mortals, she, and those connected with her, cannot, unfortunately, make a dramatic wind up; and being but a narrator, not an author, on this occasion, I cannot do "poetic justice," whatever that rather ambiguous phrase may mean. Some one replies, "poetic justice of course means rewarding all your good characters, and punishing all the bad ones". But in most characters drawn from nature, good and bad is so intimately mingled that how shall a mere mortal decide to which class each belongs? Besides, I doubt much whether any moral end is gained by representing those eminent for virtue as rising to worldly prosperity, because such is constantly not the case. It is as if we held out riches and honours as an inducement to goodness; a very low motive, and, as the world is constituted—an utterly false one. And let those who either carelessly or wilfully convey a wrong impression, and excuse themselves because their book is "only a work of fiction," remember that such a work may be more powerful for good or evil than a grave treatise or a sermon; first because it will probably have more readers, and secondly, because people who will listlessly turn over pages of moralizing, however admirably written, will seize upon, and extract for themselves, a moral conveyed through the medium of an interesting story, drawn as all stories (to be worth any thing,) ought to be drawn, faithfully from real life.

But to return to these memoirs. Little more remains to be told about the persons mentioned in them.

Mrs. Hastings Allan and her husband live in a constant itate of discord. She often says that instead of "a protector" she has found a tyrant. She has altered a will made in his favour, and left all her property to Harry—I should have said all the property that remains, for what with her own, her husband's, and her servants' extravagance she has become much poorer.

Harry, who, under my uncle's care, has improved in every respect, wisely determines to adopt a profession and be entirely independent of a fortune which the caprice of a moment may transfer to another—and which, at best, is not likely to be his for a long period; Mrs. Hastings being, as her acquaintance remark, "as likely to live twenty years longer, as any one."

Mr. Allan, though in the possession of every comfort and luxury, has a morose, care-worn look; and, like most selfish and heartless people, has, I believe, but little real enjoyment in life.

Melford and his wife have now been married more than a year, and seem to be thoroughly well-suited to each other. The difficulties attending a settler's life have afforded Melford exactly the stimulus he wanted for calling forth his spirit and energies. He declares that he was never half so happy in his life, and describes his forest home in glowing colors, as also his hunting feats and agricultural experiments—although many of these last are great failures. But this, as he observes, only gives him practical experience, and will make the triumph of future success more gratifying.

He says that although he never wishes for another home, and means to spend the remainder of his days in the new settlement, that he must in a few years pay a visit to England, if only to introduce Lady Clara to his son, whom he laughingly proposes as the future husband of the infant Evelyn.

At present young Rockingham is her favorite companion and play-fellow. Lord Robert's benevolent plan appears to answer admirably.

Mr. Johnson is a sensible and agreeable man, and already takes a warm interest in his little pupil.

Robert, to his father's great admiration and delight, has accomplished several pages of very crooked "pot-hooks and hangers," and can repeat "hic, hec, hoc," without a mistake.

And the little Evelyn, who is now nearly a year-and-a-half old, becomes more engaging every day. She is singularly beautiful and intelligent, more resembling her father than her mother in person—with his deep, luminous, thoughtful eyes; his silken hair, and finely-carved lips; but with Lady Clara's dazzling complexion and sweet smile. Better still, the child has her mother's sweetness of disposition, and bids fair to repay that mother's tenderness and affection.

I have returned from Devonshire, after a residence of three-quarters of a year amidst the beautiful scenery of its sea-coast. The sincere regret I felt at quitting the kind friends I had met with there, could not be effaced even by the joy of returning home.

Lady Clara and her darling are again at Heathfield, and Courteney is also of the party. He is in excellent health and spirits; and is come to make us a long visit. Since we last parted he has become an author, and his work has met with deserved success. His presence adds greatly to the charm of our circle, which is altogether a very happy one.

If I continue to recover, and regain sufficient strength to undertake the duties of a new and more responsible position, it is an understood thing that we are to be married. Should I become his wife, it will be my study to repay—as far as lies in my power—a constancy so unusual and so unmerited, feeling that now I love him as he deserves. For myself, I am without anxiety as regards the future, being convinced at last of what is so often said, but with difficulty realized—that every event in our lives is ordered for us by Him who doeth all things well.

I must not forget to mention another guest Mrs. Stafford, the mother of poor Edward.

Soon after her son's death she accompanied some friends to India, where, after some years, her pretty and amiable daughters were married to men worthy of them. Having seen her children happily settled, and finding the climate destructive to her health, she returned some months since to England. Lady Clara, who knew her previous history, met the poor widow at our house, and from the first took a warm interest in her. After consulting with my mother and myself, Lady Clara has offered Mrs. Stafford a home as her companion, and little Evelyn's future instructress. Mrs. Stafford, restored to health, gratefully accepted a post for which her lady-like and refined manners, her affectionate heart, and practical good sense admirably qualify her. It is a great satisfaction to me to think that Lady Clara will always have such a friend near her; and knowing the characters of each so well—for though I have not recently alluded to Mrs. Stafford, we have maintained an intimate and uninterrupted correspondence—I feel certain that a friendship so generous on one side, so devoted on the other, will steadily increase, and that this connection is for the happiness of both.

To me, the gentle placid face of Mrs. Stafford is always associated with the image of my beloved Annie. Often in the evenings, after I have retired early to rest, this kind woman will sit by my bed-side, and overleaping the time that has intervened, we speak of the past, and the bright and youthful beings who gladdened it seem to exist again for us.

Oh, joyous and dream-like days in the early dawn of youth, what are the pleasures, the loves, the knowledge, the triumphs of later years compared with your pure and innocent happiness? How difficult is it to believe that the sun is not less bright, the world more dull, and all things less beautiful than in those days!

Still, if could, I would not go back to them. I am thankful for the teaching and experience of later years, and especially for my last trial, for could I regret sufferings through which I have learned to take a more just and serious view of life—to acknowledge my own weakness and insignificance—and which have banished all "chill of scepticism" from my heart for ever?

I am deeply grateful to be a little longer spared, and if a few years are yet added to my life, I trust they will not be spent idly or unprofitably.

If I am tempted to become selfish or worldly, or to fall into grave errors, I hope to remember that in the solemn and awful time when I stood as it were face to face with Death, any generous action, any sacrifice of self, however small, any effort to serve a fellow creature, however humble, were the only things of which the retrospect gave me comfort or satisfaction—that at that dread time, when the veil of delusion was rent from my eyes, and all things stood revealed in their true character, I would have gladly given all the riches, honours, pleasures and fame of this world, had I possessed them, for the power to retract one unkind word, or to redeem one ill-employed hour.

A word more and I have done.

One of my motives in inditing these memoirs is a desire to vindicate the class of female writers from unjust aspersions. If it be objected that, with this end in view, I should not have drawn a character full of faults and imperfections, like my own, but an ideal of what a woman and an authoress ought to be, I can only answer, that such is not within the range of my experience. I pretend not to show that authors of either sex are better than other people, but merely that there is no reason why they should be worse, and that it is unfair to assume that a woman either neglects or is incapable of performing her social or domestic duties, because she spends a portion of her time in labouring to amuse and instruct others through the only public channel open to her sex. And surely her imaginative and intellectual faculties were meant to find expression no less than those of men, or such faculties would not have been bestowed.

A woman, if she be a true woman, will feel that the possession of unusual powers involves unusual responsibilities—and narrow, indeed, must be her heart, and contemptible her mind, if her exertions and influence do not begin with, and centre in her home. Let it be understood that I do not mean to include the numerous ladies, old and young, who become literary for the sake of fashion, or of gain, or to gratify a paltry vanity; who write with no seriousness of purpose, with no earnest love for and sympathy with their kind, no heartfelt desire to aid the eternal cause of truth and virtue—who mistake eccentricity for genius, and think, by displaying ignorance or neglect of a woman's most important duties, to obtain credit for learning and talents which they do not possess—and who, by their folly and absurdity, their presumption and conceit, bring discredit on a noble and honorable calling.

It is with a profound sense of the responsibility I have taken upon myself, and a humbling consciousness of my own deficiencies, that I now close this Record. Yet if but one among those who may hereafter read these pages, should be warned by my errors, or rendered wiser by my experience—should be convinced of a truth or converted from a prejudice, then not wholly in vain shall I have written the History of my Life.

THE END.

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